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LIGHT MY CANDLE

A BOOK OF REFLECTIONS

Light My Candle

A BOOK OF REFLECTIONS

"The Spirit of Man is the Candle of the Lord"
—Proverbs 20:27

1232

By
HENRY VAN DYKE
and
TERTIUS VAN DYKE

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PREFACE

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THIS book is a harvest of youth and age,—the work of a son and his father.

Our way of working together was singular. We were not living in the same house, nor even in the same town. We were not consulting each other daily about the book, nor collaborating on the separate chapters. Each of us was busy with his own regular job. But when we met we talked over things in general, and from time to time each would write down, briefly and carefully, the reflections which came to him about life, and the faith which animates life, and the hope which gives it the promise of immortality, and the love human and Divine which makes it worth living.

These reflections, gathered in this volume, are not meant to be taken as definitions of doctrine or hard and fast rules of conduct. They are simply rays from the lanterns of two travelers through the woods seeking the same goal. One has just passed the half-way house; the other must be pretty near the end of the road.

But the curious thing about these notes of spiritual travel is that there is no outstanding difference between those which come from youth and those which come from age. The reader will find it difficult to tell when the son is speaking and when the father. The writers themselves have sometimes found the same difficulty. In assembling the paragraphs for the book we have asked each other, "Did you write that, or did I?"

Now the reason for this strange unity of purpose and spirit seems to us clear and worth noting here at the

outset. It is not the effect of a deliberate conformity, as if one of us were the teacher and the other the pupil, one the leader and the other the follower. It is rather the result,—unconscious in its operation,—of a conviction which we share. Our religion is a heritage. It is not our own discovery or invention. It comes to us, in its vital essence, from those who have gone before us on the path of faith and hope and love. Above all it comes to us from Jesus of Nazareth, the Divine Saviour who became the son of man to give us power to become the sons of God.

Thus we dare to speak of *our* religion even as we speak of *our* country, not because it belongs to us, but because we belong to it. It is given to us to have, but not to hold. Say rather to share, to spread, to develop in new uses, to apply to new problems, to cast a ray into dark places, to pass on to others if they will accept it.

If the Lord lights our candle, shall we not hold out our little candlestick to other guests in the Great House before we all go up to bed?

HENRY VAN DYKE.

A NEW HEART FOR THE NEW YEAR

There is no new thing under the sun.—Ecclesiastes 1:9.
He that sitteth on the throne said, Behold I make all things new.—Revelation 21:5.

From the point of view of material circumstances there is nothing new under the sun. There is not even a New Year; there is only another year.

Our forefathers traveled by coach, or on horseback, on foot and by sailing ship. We by express trains, floating palaces, automobiles and flying-machines. But these are only new methods of doing the same old thing. Progress in material efficiency, increase of speed, implies nothing new in the elemental circumstances of life.

Yet John, standing on rocky Patmos, with the eternal heavens above him and the ancient ocean around him, heard Him that sitteth on the throne saying, Behold I make all things new.

How is this? Surely the meaning is plain: Christ makes all things new because He produces a change in us and in our relations to all things.

The only way to find a new heaven and a new earth is to obtain a new heart. When we become new creatures in Christ Jesus the old things are passed away, behold they are become new!

It is the folly of earthly wisdom that men limit the idea of newness to that which is novel,—experienced for the first time. In truth the familiar is also "new" if we approach it with a fresh heart.

The man who is renewed in Christ is like one returning to life from a desperate illness. To him the familiar trees and grass and sky are new—not because they are different from what they always were, but because he himself is made new by an inward transformation.

A COMPETENCE

Give me neither poverty nor riches.—Proverbs 30: 8.

All level-headed people agree that enough is as good as a feast,—probably even better, when digestion is considered. But the point where opinions begin to differ is the definition of "enough."

One person feels poor with an income which other persons would regard as rich. One man is happy in a home which other men would despise as a hovel.

"To retire on a competence" used to be the ambition of worthy men of business. But what is a competence? And why should an able-minded man retire, when work is the best thing for him?

Evidently there are practical questions here which can not be settled by bromidic platitudes. A man must work them out for himself, with certain general principles to guide him.

1. Remember the word of Christ: What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

2. Take counsel from St. Paul: Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.

3. Listen to the doctors: Plain food is better than rich food, and simple pleasures are more healthful than luxuries.

4. Earn as much as you can honestly, making the aim of your labour not wealth but usefulness.

5. When you come to the end of your working power, rest and be thankful, and help others who have been less fortunate.

SILENCED FAITH

The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is the word of faith.—Romans 10: 8.

Nothing is easier than to show, to the serious and capable thinker, that faith is the basis on which alone all thought and activity are possible. The difficulties arise chiefly with the half-baked thinker, the wilfully prejudiced (for reasons of personal profit), and the abysmally ignorant. Most men who lead a normal human life come sooner or later to the reverent recognition of faith. The contest which the religious teacher or preacher must enter is not with human nature as at heart unbelieving, but with the things which make men unwilling or unable to confess their faith. Much has been written about the pain of an unspoken confession of guilt. Not enough about the anguish of a silenced faith.

Perhaps the work of religion would be greatly forwarded in the world if we all recognized that faith is native to the soul and then set to work to liberate, each in the other, the expression of that faith.

For any one who looks with understanding upon men must appreciate the unspeakable torment of unbelief. Only that man whose whole life bears witness to a faith greater than himself can obtain happiness in this world.

Is there not in that a real lesson both for believers and for those who are temporarily unbelievers?

DISSOLVING HABITATIONS

For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—II Corinthians 5: 1.

To one who has lived long in New York, or any other of our big cities, nothing is more remarkable than the melting away of great houses, once the landmarks of their time. In my own brief day I have seen princely habitations built of costly materials, illumined with regal gayety, and now crumbled into rubbish, to make room for the new abodes of commerce and democratic wealth.

When will vain man learn that he is but a pilgrim and a stranger, and that his most splendid mansions are only tents and tabernacles?

This is the figure of speech that St. Paul uses to illustrate the frailty and transience of the bodies in which we men and women live on earth.

Disease weakens them, accidents threaten them, old age pulls them down. Shall we then be naked, shelterless, homeless?

No, says Paul, for God is building a house for us which is eternal,—the spiritual body.

What is it like? Ah, that we cannot yet understand. But we know that it is built of faith, and hope, and love, the three things which abide forever.

HISTORY AND LIFE

Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.—Isaiah 43: 18.

Remember the former things of old.—Isaiah 46: 9.

All truth contains an element of paradox. The answer to most questions is yes and no. This means simply that we can never escape the responsibility for using our own judgment. The element of common sense is a part of religion as of everything else worth while.

As a chain about the neck, or a dead hand laid upon life, the past must be denied and repudiated.

As a source of experience wider than our own personal experience, and as a well of wisdom it deserves careful consideration.

The future is never totally determined by the past: otherwise there could be no such thing as history.

But we must see to it that we do not become the prisoners of history. Rather must we be trained by a just contemplation of the past to deal with the issues of our own day.

The influence of the past is neither good nor bad in itself, except as we make it bad through our failure rightly to appraise its lessons.

No one but an ignoramus would consider himself capable of living a just life without regard to the past. No one but a fool would try to live worthily today with his eyes turned always backward.

PROFITEERS

I pray you, let us leave off this usury.—Nehemiah 5: 10.

In every time of war, or of national peril and distress, there are people who make great gain out of the misfortune of others. These are called "profiteers." They are sometimes worshipped for their wealth. But they should be despised for their greed, and damned for their inhumanity.

Nehemiah had people like this around him. They held mortgages on their less fortunate neighbours which threw them into starvation or slavery. It was on behalf of these unfortunates that he made his beautiful and strong appeal.

Sentiment, of course! But it was also good business sense. For unless these debtors could be restored, their creditors could not hope for safety and prosperity.

Certainly this has a bearing upon the money debts of the Allied Nations to the United States. But I am not writing about international politics,—only about personal religion.

Therefore I ask you to read again from the gospel of Matthew 18: 21-35. The law of supply and demand is cogent. But the Gospel of Christ is more important.

INADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

If ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear: knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things . . . but with . . . the blood of Christ.—I Peter 1: 17-19.

There are many people today whose conception of God is failing them because it is a cheap and superficial thing, lacking in depth and quality. They have been going along in the easy attitude of the careless young man who says to himself: "O well, if I get into trouble the old man will pull me out."

When trouble comes the prayer of such people to escape the consequences of their careless and sometimes evil conduct does not at all match with the purpose of God. Then they are surprised, even aggrieved and rebellious, and declare their unbelief.

And all the time the difficulty is that they have cherished an inadequate and petty conception of God.

I am not interested to try to apportion the blame for this tragic situation in which many find themselves. Undoubtedly the preachers are too much engaged with "popular topics." And equally truly are many Church members avoiding serious consideration of the nature of God and the consequent duties of man.

It is well that we should realize Jesus' emphasis on the name of Father as revealing the nature of God. But it is assuredly not well that we should abuse that name by reducing it to its shoddy popular proportions.

We must turn from our stupid and unreal theories of an easy-going, good-natured God to the Living God in nature, in history and in the heart of man.

PROFESSIONAL JEALOUSY

There ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua . . . said, My lord Moses, forbid them.—Numbers 11:27-28.

There you have an illustration of one of the meanest things in human nature—professional jealousy. It was not said that Eldad and Medad were prophesying falsely. No accusation was made against them except that they were prophesying in the camp without having been present at the door of the tabernacle with the others when they experienced the presence of the Spirit. Joshua considered this an irregularity and asked Moses to forbid their activity.

But the rugged and honest Moses declined to take such a petty action and expressed the pious hope: "Would that all Jehovah's people were prophets, that Jehovah would put his Spirit upon them!"

It is a well-merited rebuke to a jealous proposal, and a noble utterance of faith in God's use of men.

Would it not be a salutary lesson for us all if we laid to heart the truth that the right to speak on God's behalf is a gift bestowed not by men but by God Himself?

There may be standardized ways of discovering the qualifications of men for the performance of any particular function. But these standardized ways ought not to blind us to the fact that God is not limited to the ways that commend themselves to us.

PARTIAL KNOWLEDGE ENOUGH FOR THE PRESENT

Now I know in part; but then shall I know fully.—I Corinthians 13: 12.

Long ago I heard President James McCosh preach from this text in the Princeton Chapel.

" Religion is full of questions that we cannot answer," said he, " because we only know in part,"—a long pause, then with thrilling emphasis,—" *but we know!* "

There are things of which we may be positively certain though we cannot comprehend all their connections and relations. We know that our souls exist as truly as our bodies. We know that there is a God, who is not blind force, but a spirit who answers the souls who seek Him in spirit and in truth. We know that good brings peace and joy, evil brings discord and death to the soul. We know that Jesus Christ is absolutely good, the perfect union of the Divine and the Human spirits. We know through Him that love is the source of power, and that life continues after death.

Beyond our ken lie the mysteries unexplored. But we have light enough to steer by, if we will. We know as much as we need. If we live by it we shall know more, some day.

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pence? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God . . . ye are of more value than many sparrows.—Luke 12:6-7.

Every significant moment in human history is marked by a fresh discovery of the worth of the individual. Today there are many signs pointing in that direction. Thoughtful men are turning in disgust from the palpable failure of endeavours to deal with men as indifferent and indistinguishable units of a human mass. Mechanistic theories of human life are being rejected, not so much because they are argued down in university class-rooms, but because they are found to be totally inadequate as explanations of human activity throughout the world.

Many public institutions for the care of dependents and incompetents are trying to deal with people as individuals rather than as cases. Homes (with a capital H) for orphans are being transformed as rapidly as possible from barracks with uniform regulations, and wherever opportunity affords children are being sent to a home (with a small h) and the things that go with it.

Everything from hospital to prison is affected by the rediscovery of the individual.

Ought we not to rejoice in this sign of our times? For it means a new realization of the eternal truth that Jesus taught: The absolute worth of the individual soul before God in this world as well as in the life beyond.

CONFERENCES OR WORK

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.—Nehemiah 6:3.

Sanballat was a crafty foe. Four times he sent messengers to Nehemiah begging him to come down for a conference in the plain of Ono. But each time the answer of Nehemiah, building the wall, was the same: "Busy, sorry, can't come."

I think Nehemiah was right. The work committed to the hand of each man is for him the most important thing,—the will of God, concrete.

No doubt, conferences have done great good in the world. They have made strangers acquainted. They have promoted friendships.

But it seems to me, just now, that we have too many of them. Philanthropic joy-rides, paid for by the Church or the Government, cost more than they come to. Too many conferences!

I think the best thing that Christians can do just now is to stick to the job that lies nearest to them. Maybe the teaching of a class in Sunday-school, maybe the Christianizing of a church, maybe the humanizing of an industry. Maybe the making of a true home.

Great work! Greater than a conference. Work on the walls!

THE CULT OF IGNORANCE

His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.—Isaiah 56: 10.

It is a curious but none the less evident sign of our times that many people cultivate ignorance. Despite the crowds of youth storming the doors of our schools and colleges, yes, sometimes even within the Halls of Learning, there is a considerable number of people who despise knowledge. It is fashionable nowadays to have a college degree, but a thoroughly trained mind is far from being the uniform purpose in winning that degree.

Some one has said: "A crank is an expert on a subject in which you are not interested,"—and to this may be added the popular conclusion: Of course, nobody wants to be a crank!

At bottom this attitude is a justification for idle dreaming. We need to remember the profound wisdom of the old dominie's advice to Ramsay MacDonald: "You master: that is education. When you have mastered one thing you are well on your way to mastering all things."

The ideal of a "well-rounded man" may have its good points. But let it not become the degenerate ideal that a smattering of information on many subjects constitutes an educated man. To qualify as a man of the world will never satisfy the soul. Somewhere the soul must come to grips with reality in its naked strength. Any education which does not lead to that is only the cult of ignorance.

PERILOUS EASE

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion.—Amos 6: 1.

All of us realize the peril of luxury and ease in the abstract. But most of us think that the particular luxuries which are within our reach are harmless—at least for ourselves.

Life is crowded with examples of brilliant careers wrecked by the degenerations of ease, great opportunities ungrasped because of a grip softened by luxury, and general social deterioration arising out of sybaritic manners and customs.

And yet a very considerable number of people are quite unable to act otherwise than as if comfort were the first objective of their lives.

Disastrous as this attitude is in the general terms of human life, it is far worse because more far-reaching in the particular realm of the spirit.

What could be more perilous than a soporific religion? What more corrupting than a "religious" attitude that induces self-complacency?

To be at ease in Zion is truly the most perfect of paradoxes. It is the divorce of religion and morals and the herald of the death of the soul.

Peace and Assurance,—yes, these are religious words. But Ease is paganism unashamed even when it seeks the odour of sanctity in Zion.

Did not Jesus invite us: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls"?

That yoke is easy; but not on the necks of those who are at ease in Zion.

IDLERS AND LOAFERS

Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while.—Mark 6: 31.

We feel instinctively that there is an essential difference between the word "idler" and the word "loafer." The first describes one who for the moment is not engaged in work. The second describes one who makes it a point never to do any work if he can possibly get out of it.

To be idle sometimes is the part of wisdom. It is the needful rest and relaxation which Christ invited His disciples to share with Him when they were overstrained and worn out with labour. The best way to enjoy it is to get away from the crowd into some quiet place where the heart can be still with God in the open air. It is most sweet when it is shared by true friends.

Such idleness may be very fruitful. It reaps

> "The harvest of a quiet eye
> That broods and sleeps on His own heart."

But the *loafer* is a person unprofitable to himself as well as to others. He is a parasite, a thief of time, a cumberer of the ground. If he will not work, neither let him eat. Then he will soon pass away,—unless he happens to inherit a fortune.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven.—Matthew 13:33.

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.—Matthew 16:6.

There is no more powerful thing in the world than an idea. It never rests. Once planted in a mind it reaches out continually trying to pervade all minds one after the other. Like leaven in dough, it is in a constant state of fermentation.

And this is true not only of good ideas but of bad ones. For human nature is not naturally discriminating. Most men treat their minds as small children do their mouths—as a receptacle for anything that comes along.

And yet the only assurance that men will be nourished on spiritual ideas lies in their ability to discriminate between the good and bad leaven and to choose accordingly. No law can be made to require the choice of the good leaven. No one can legislate against the fact that the same natural law of progression applies to good and evil ideas.

No evil idea has ever been legislated out of existence. Evil ideas have died of starvation and neglect, but never from being labelled illegal.

Each person must be taught how to discriminate between good and evil ideas, and how to present to one an open welcome and to the other a locked and sealed door.

For the only governance to which ideas are subject is the control of individual persons.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways:
And how small a whisper do we hear of him.
—Job 26: 14.

There is no antagonism between science and religion. They are only two different ways of studying God. Religion proceeds within the spiritual experience of man, science within the ascertained facts of nature. Both are indispensable.

But frankly I must confess that the methods of the servants of science, at present, are superior to the methods of the servants of religion.

Here are half-a-dozen religious conferences, assemblies, conventions, and so on. They content themselves with passing vague, arrogant resolutions about the outlawry of war, prohibition, censorship of books and plays, without a single definite and practical suggestion.

Here is a conference of doctors and surgeons who are seeking to exterminate cancer. They look for the germ of the disease. They seek patiently and eagerly for an antidote. They are hopeful but not arrogant.

Would to God that His servants in religion could be as wise, practical, and humble as His servants in science!

When we seek to know His ways in creation and providence, is not every natural fact a sacred thing, a word from Him?

When we try to do His will, shall we not listen and wait patiently for every whisper and hint that may help us to serve Him more efficiently?

Vague Omniscience does not become churchmen. Humility and Courage are better.

LEGISLATION IN THE HEART

I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it.—Jeremiah 31 : 33.

It is commonly (and it seems to me justifiably) said of Americans today that they think they can legislate the coming of the millennium. Certainly one of the first remarks you hear when men discuss any particular evil is: There ought to be a law about that.

But what good is a law written on the books until it becomes also written in the people's hearts? Law as an external force may be serviceable to reduce a recalcitrant minority to conformity. But nothing is surer than the futility of legislation contrary to the public conscience. Witness the fugitive slave law in Civil War days.

Precisely so is it in ecclesiastical affairs. To endeavor to lead men by means of an external law which cannot be transcribed on the heart is utter folly. To attempt to enforce conformity in ritual or theology apart from the heart's response is intolerable tyranny.

Despite the furious activity of ecclesiastical politicians in the Church and would-be dominant groups in the republic, the honest man in Church and State will always be more interested in unity than in conformity, and will recognize that the foundation stone of legislation is education.

Neither in family, church nor state can you legislate the millennium. That is why religion will always be the most important thing in the world. It writes its laws in the heart.

IMPATIENT IDEALISTS

There shall be the seed of peace.—Zechariah 8: 12.

Some people have no patience to consider ways and means. They want what they call "results," and they want them immediately. They call themselves idealists largely because they will have nothing to do with anything except perfection.

We find them railing at the Church because the Church is still a faulty and inadequate institution. We find them denouncing the government because that, too, has its weaknesses. We find them criticizing the frailties of human nature with bitter language.

But how seldom do we find them labouring to ameliorate the conditions they decry. O no, what they want is reform by a single sweeping gesture—everything or nothing. They are like a man who, finding himself in New York and desiring to be in Pittsburgh, refuses to take the train because his desire is not to spend time on the train but to be in Pittsburgh.

Lots of people show that frame of mind toward world peace. They have no patience for the slow cultivation of the seed of peace. They want world peace through the waving of a formula like a magic wand. Instead of observing the enormous advance towards peace in the past five years they dejectedly announce that everything has failed because forsooth peace is not yet universally established.

But peace, like other valuable things, is not obtained all at once. It grows from the seed to the fruit by the process of patient cultivation. Very few things (outside of fables) leap forth full-formed from the beginning.

What we need from our idealists is less pessimistic denunciation and more patient labour.

THE ABUSE OF IMAGINATION

The eye is not satisfied with seeing.—Ecclesiastes 1 : 8.

The power of imagination is a great force in the discovery of truth. But, like all qualities of human nature, it must be reasonably employed. Imagination should invade the realm of physical facts, but it must not be allowed to set itself up on a parity with established facts.

Some of the bitterest controversies arise from the failure to observe a simple distinction: We confuse the outreaching of imagination with plain facts, and quarrel ferociously where we ought to inquire diligently.

It is so easy to imagine that we have found what we want or expect to find.

The man lost in the desert always sees water—just over there.

You and I are always finding justification for our prejudices—not from the facts in the case, but from imagination.

Once allow yourself to hate a man and see how speedily you can amass evidence to justify your hate.

As we struggled to the foot of the great wood and iron cross that tops the snowy summit of the Gross Glockner in the Tyrolean Alps I turned to our guide with a question: "Can we see the Adriatic Sea from here?"

He smiled as at a familiar question and replied: "Well, many tourists have seen it—but no guides."

Indeed the eye is not satisfied with seeing. Often it insists on seeing what is not visible.

Ye that . . . prepare a table for Fortune, and that fill up mingled wine unto Destiny; I will destine you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter.—Isaiah 65: 11-12.

Men are much inclined to talk about bad luck as a leading element in accounting for their failures. And in talking about the successes of other men they often have much to say about good luck. For the most part these terms are only subterfuges for maintaining the talkers' self-respect. And they are just as much illusions as the gambler's projection of the divinity of Fortune to lend tone to his inordinate greed for excitement and money.

When all is said and done this is just paganism in civilized garb:—the making of gods by the personification of human qualities. It is perhaps as good a way as any to justify our weakness and depreciate the strength of other men. But it's a coward's game at best, and ought to be left alone by all honest men.

If a man exercises foresight and develops the strength and courage to include various contingencies in the scope of his plans, he puts luck in its proper place as the minor uncertainty that lends savour to life. Luck is too much dependent on men to be a god.

Nansen once said of Amundsen's discovery of the South Pole: "Let no one come and prate about luck and chance, Amundsen's luck is that of the strong man who looks ahead."

PROPHETS VERSUS OFFICIALS

A prophet is not without honour save in his own country.—Matthew 13: 57.

This is one of the sayings in which the keen irony of Jesus of Nazareth is shown. If He had been a high official, a rabbi, or a ruler, no doubt His fellow-townsmen would have listened to Him respectfully and treasured His words. But because He was only a labourer and a prophet, speaking for God with no other authority than the splendid verity of what He said, His neighbours despised Him. They knew the humble conditions of His life and family. They had seen Him working in the carpenter shop. Impossible that such a person should be great! Absurd to do Him honour! Measured by their parochial standard Jesus was one of the least important citizens of Nazareth.

But measured by the larger standard of world-vision, and spiritual wisdom, and power upon the soul of man, Jesus was the greatest teacher and leader ever seen on earth.

This is the distinction between prophets and officials. Dressed in a little brief authority, officials feast on honours in the place where they dwell. Men bow down to them and praise them and give them reverence for their titles. But prophets must not look for this kind of two-penny reward. Their honour does not depend on local rank. It is the silent tribute of the world to the truth and beauty of their teaching.

THE "FULNESS" WORDS

He that showeth mercy with cheerfulness.—Romans 12:8.

I like those words which end with "fulness."

Of course some of them are bad, like hatefulness, and deceitfulness, and harmfulness.

But how many more of them are good! Hopefulness, and joyfulness, and thoughtfulness, and mercifulness, and above all faithfulness.

What is the reason for this liking? Perhaps it is because these words have something inward about them. They describe a quality which fills the heart and overflows naturally into the life.

They are not words of mere obedience to outward law. They are words of spontaneous goodness coming from the voluntary union of the soul with that which is best.

They seem to me like springs and fountains ever flowing from a secret source.

They remind me of that glorious saying of Christ: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."

Modern religion is much concerned with plumbing. But Christ cares for the water supply.

LOST

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die.—Isaiah 22:13.

What would you think of a man who, finding himself lost in the woods, said: "Well, now that I'm lost I may as well get as much pleasure out of it as I can," and began to wander aimlessly around picking flowers and hunting for birds' nests?

What would you think of the captain of a vessel who, being driven out of his course in a storm and unable to take observations, came down from the bridge, and said to crew and passengers: "We're lost, so we'll just sail around and amuse ourselves and try to forget our troubles"?

Of course you would say that both these men were crazy. No matter if they were lost, their duty was to set a sharp look-out to discover their position and in the meantime to keep cool and use their best judgment to recover the lost way. In the woods or at sea we cannot imagine such foolish and cowardly actions except from a man out of his head.

And yet in the issues of life such conduct is not uncommon. Men get into a fog of doubt or a thicket of confusing opinions, throw up their hands in despair, and say, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die."

The pursuit of fleeting pleasures and distracting amusements is the counsel of despair that leads to death.

THE POWER OF A LIFE PURPOSE

I hold not my life of any account as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course.—Acts 20: 24.

When you look at life as an observer the things that happen to you seem of tremendous importance. When you look at life as an actor they seem insignificant.

Paul could look at the certainty of bonds and afflictions and say, " None of these things move me," because he was totally preoccupied with the honourable completion of his ministry. He could even speak of finishing his course with joy. Why? Because invincible to all things that might affect him was his spiritual delight in carrying through to its conclusion the commission he had received from God.

A purposeless life is always an unhappy one, no matter how easy its outward circumstances. A life directed to its goal has always happiness in it. For when all is said and done, " happiness consists not so much in the absence of pain as in the presence of joy."

Too often we dread " what may happen to us," and conduct our lives on the basis of avoiding all danger or even discomfort.

How much better for ourselves as well as more serviceable to a needy world if we should heed the call of God and trust in the joy of spiritual purpose to overcome the pain of outward events.

Is it not proverbial that it is always the innocent bystander that gets hurt?

SILLY LAUGHTER

As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool.—Ecclesiastes 7 : 6.

I do not mean the jolly " ha-ha " that follows a practical joke or a farcical comedy, nor even those youthful outbursts of laughter that are so common among boys and girls when there is really nothing to laugh at. These are good physical exercise. They signify little, but they promote digestion.

What I mean is the cheap and senseless ridicule of serious things by people who cannot understand them. Every ideal, every forward movement in the world, has been greeted with this ridicule.

The Athenians on the Areopagus heard St. Paul with a polite grin. But Christianity survives, while Athens is a back number, or worse.

Laughter is a powerful weapon.

But it is not an argument.

That is because fools like to laugh more than they like to think.

The thorns crackle under the pot. But if you want to get your dinner, you must look for better wood.

TOO LATE

The door was shut.—Matthew 25: 10.

What a hopeless sound this phrase has!

One can almost hear the rasping bolts, and then the hurrying feet and the despairing cry of those who were too late to enter. The foolish virgins of Christ's parable were facing the fact that there is a point in life at which no excuses will avail.

The door is shut. There is absolutely nothing to be done about it. All action should have been taken beforehand. Now it is too late.

But the important thing to remember is that the arrival at the inexorable point of hopelessness is always the culmination of what has gone before; and that this desperate plight is avoidable if we are continually ready.

Many of us are going to do great things—tomorrow. But tomorrow never comes. For the only day we have is today. And this corrupting habit of running behind schedule—even in small things—has for its inevitable result the bringing of us face to face with a shut door.

The demand that life makes on all of us is to be ready at all times, to live neither in the past nor in the future but in the present.

Until we learn that lesson we cannot escape the certain consequence that we shall one day stand, sorrowful but too late, before the one door through which we desire to enter but cannot—because it is shut.

THE LOVE OF ENEMIES

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies.—Matthew 5: 43-44.

I would not lead you to think that I have anything new to say on this most difficult injunction of the Christian religion. But I would like to remind myself with you that we have no right to turn away from it and decline even to think seriously about it.

There must be some way of obeying it, or else we are in the position of people tantalized by an impossible command given by a Master whose one desire is our eternal welfare. The thing is preposterous. It is too diabolical.

What, then, hinders us?

First, the long-cherished and entrenched delusion that it is impossible,—with the consequent cessation of effort. We forget the centuries of failure that precede success in any field of achievement. How long have men been trying to fly? And with what speed has the triumph advanced under the concentration of effort and the drawing together of divergent inventions on the basis of the formulation of a few simple laws!

May it not be just so with the love of enemies? The intelligent application of continuous effort is almost an irresistible force. When it is lined up with the will of God it is omnipotent.

O, of course, we may fail. But is there any sober reason for not trying? Think of it! You might be a discoverer in this wilderness almost untouched by human effort.

ON MAKING ENEMIES

Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?—James 4:4.

Lots of people think that the best way to fulfil that most difficult of all Christian teachings: "Love your enemies," is to avoid making any enemies. And so they go about cautiously dodging all clashes, compromising and trimming and making concessions even on matters of principle.

It is of course evident that the peaceable and gentle spirit is an important element in Christian character. But it is by no means true that the best Christian is he who has the fewest enemies. Indeed, a man will never do anything valuable in this world without making enemies. And the counsel of Jesus is not to avoid making enemies but to love even those who are become our enemies,—which is quite a different affair.

When we stop to think about it, a man's enemies are quite as indicative of his character as his friends are. The only makers of enemies who are worthy of condemnation are those who alienate all men, or who insist on maintaining enmity when its cause is past.

Jesus Himself began by making friends, but He never hesitated to incur the hostility of those who opposed the work God sent Him to do. And all His great disciples ever since have followed that course.

SPIRITUAL HEREDITY

Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham.—Galatians 3 : 7.

A man's descent from honourable ancestors is not a proper subject for personal boasting,—even though it is often so regarded. Whatever glory there may be belongs to the ancestors, not the descendant. Let the descendant rather put his attention on seeing that the line is continued unimpaired.

But alongside of this natural heredity in which a man has no choice as regards himself, there is the line of spiritual heredity in which he may have the leading choice.

With whom is he to be related in the realm of mind and spirit?

Keats, born in his grandfather's posting-house, chose affinity with the Greek poets and Shakespeare rather than with grooms and hostlers, or even that with doctors and surgeons which was first offered him in his proposed career.

As I write this I think of the little fishing village on an outlying sea-island where we have just spent several days. In those humble and hospitable homes familiar with tragedy and loneliness we found gentleness and courtesy, good books and noble thinking. And the people of whom they chiefly spoke were their spiritual ancestors,—a few beloved authors and occasional visitors who touched and stirred their spirits. One could be more at home there than in many a fine house where the master's famous forebears provide the chief topic of polite but wearisome conversation.

The sons of Abraham who are entitled to rejoice in their ancestor are those who, by living in faith, have chosen him for their spiritual father.

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HELPFULNESS BEYOND THEORIES

A cup of cold water.—Matthew 10:42.

One of the most lovely of human qualities is plain and unadorned helpfulness. It is not common enough to pass unnoticed. Among the worldly wise it is notoriously lacking.

Even those of us who call ourselves disciples of Christ too often allow our theories to inhibit practical helpfulness. Instead of fixing our eye on the human need and getting into action to meet that need we launch off on our general theories and neglect the concrete instance.

How many human obligations remain unpaid, how many opportunities for service ungrasped, just because of this foolish habit of our uncontrolled minds.

Of course no sane man thinks that life can be reduced to the spurious simplicity of helpfulness. Hard, consistent thinking is always necessary. But what I want to know is: Why should we allow our theorizing to cripple our activities?

Why should college graduates so often be expert in the dialectics of philosophic doubt, and sometimes so lethargic in performing particular service?

It is important for the human mind to work out the theories of life. But what does the thought that hamstrings effort amount to?

While you are theorizing about population and water supply and the nature of man perhaps you are neglecting a request for a cup of cold water.

By all means think. But why neglect to act? For that, too, is life.

MY GOSPEL

According to my gospel.—Romans 2: 16.

When St. Paul speaks of "my gospel" he does not mean that he has invented it, or that he owns it, or that he has a right to limit or define it.

On the contrary, he means that it has found him, that he belongs to it, that it is a living force within him, inspiring and guiding him in all his work and preaching.

What is it then, this gospel, this good news which took possession of Paul's soul and sent him out to preach it to Jews and Gentiles?

It is the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the revealer of our Father in Heaven. It is the assurance that His death on the cross is the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world, and that through faith in it the vilest sinner may find forgiveness. It is the promise that Christ's spirit of love will enable those who trust Him to overcome all enemies,—even the last enemy, which is death.

This is Paul's gospel. Happy are we if it is ours.

UNCONTROLLED HASTE

His nurse took him up, and fled; and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame.—II Samuel 4: 4.

It was a tragic thing that happened to little five-year-old Mephibosheth when the news of the death of Jonathan his father came to the royal palaces. His nurse caught him up to carry him to safety and escape the inevitable revolution, but she dropped him; and ever after he was lame.

The accident was due to haste, and not to wilful neglect. The woman's purpose was good, but she executed it poorly because she was panic-stricken.

Here is one of a long list of tragic accidents due to uncontrolled haste. Nothing is ever gained by trying to do anything when you are off balance. Unless you are able to keep yourself under perfect control in time of crisis, you become a peril not only to yourself but to others.

This truth needs especially to be remembered in this day of fast transportation. Every day the newspapers contain accounts of accidents due to speed beyond control. Most of those responsible for the accidents are full of remorse afterwards. But what good is that to the victims?

Surely there are enough unavoidable accidents to justify us in reducing the unnecessary ones by observing every reasonable precaution.

The place to begin is by controlling yourself.

SALUTARY HARSHNESS

The rod and reproof give wisdom;
But a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother.
—Proverbs 29: 15.

Spoiled children are bad enough in themselves, but when they are grown up they are intolerable. And I will leave it to any careful observer of human nature to say whether, or not, we are overstocked with spoiled children (young and old) today.

This idea of allowing all men to choose their own way, "to make their bed and lie in it," has a fine sound of liberality about it; but when it degenerates into mere indifference and irresponsibility on our part toward others—especially those who must look to us for guidance—it is just plain bunk.

Is there no such thing as the social inheritance of ideals? By what insane reasoning do we conclude that all tradition is evil? Is each individual limited for his education to his own personal experiments?

Is it fair,—especially is it fair to children, to launch them in such a world as this without discipline, without warning? Is it really kindness to let any one grow up, apart from the experience of punishment, in the delusion that the world centres about him? Why do we shake our heads over our friends when their backs are turned?

Why not be strictly honest and fearlessly kind, and say and do what we know is needful?

THORNS IN THE FLESH

There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me.—II Corinthians 12:7.

What was this "thorn" to which the Apostle Paul alludes so feelingly, not only in this letter to the Corinthians but also in his letter to the Galatians?

Nobody knows, but a great many writers have made guesses about it. Some say that it was the general frailty and insignificance of his "bodily presence"; others guess (a wild guess, this) that it was a nagging wife like the consort who tormented Job; others conjecture that it was what the modern psychoanalysts call an inferiority complex. But the sensible commentators incline to the view that it was either an epileptic tendency or a form of eye-disease common in the East. Perhaps it was both. What difference does it make?

The point is that Paul did not describe his thorn and dwell upon its nature and details. Three times, he says, he prayed to be delivered from it, but it stayed. So he carried it, and went on with his work, vigorously, cheerfully, triumphantly to the end. A good example!

Let us not make much of our "thorns," lest they afflict our friends. Let us rather think of our "roses," and give thanks for them. This is the "power that is made perfect in weakness."

HALF-TRUTHS

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.—Proverbs 25: 2.

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever—he revealeth the deep and secret things.—Daniel 2: 20, 22.

Most important truths are half-truths;—which is only another way of saying that life is more than mind.

Both of these declarations about God are true. The apparent contradiction in their conclusions is due, not to their inaccuracy, but to the inherent absolutism of our minds.

Was it not Ruskin who said that he never felt that he had fully expressed himself on any subject until he had contradicted himself at least three times?

Somewhere (I can't recall where) I have lately come across the idea, in speech or writing, that truth is not so much an object to be encased in words as a target at which we aim our words with varying degrees of success.

If that be taken, not as an excuse for the careless use of language, but as an explanation of the limitations of words, I should say that it was a very valuable idea.

In particular, when we deal with statements about God we ought to recognize the absolute inadequacy of any declaration when considered in entire isolation. Any description of God must necessarily be but a partial truth. Unless, indeed, we desire to maintain the irreligious view that God is the creation of our own minds.

PRESENT BLESSINGS

Now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.—I John 3:2.

That is a good verse to read, because the writer of it is not only looking ahead with hope, but is appreciative of the blessings of his immediate situation.

It is a good frame of mind, but alas! a rare one.

The common attitude of our day—even among those who look to the future hopefully—is sharply critical, often sad or bitter as regards the present. Many of us have forgotten how to enjoy our daily blessings because we are obsessed with possible evil in the future, or more often because our attention is wholly focussed on certain secondary troubles of today.

After all, it is something to be one of God's children now, today, this very minute. Why not sometimes lay aside all the uncertainties with which man can only deal by faith, and spend a moment realizing the privilege you have in being a child of God?

It will not do to take this as a matter of course. You cannot shuffle your way through life and still find it gracious and beautiful.

The good Christian perceives glories unspeakable beyond the present time. But he also rejoices greatly in the privilege of today. He is no despiser of the blessings of the passing moment. He asserts confidently and thankfully, "Now are we children of God."

HUMBLE VIRTUES

In your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge.—II Peter 1 : 5.

It was said by Professor Brander Matthews concerning a certain famous French writer now dead, that he "understands everything—except perhaps those very commonplace virtues which sustain the social fabric."

There are lots of people like that—at least in their failure to understand the simple virtues. They have allowed learning to outweigh human values. They are so sophisticated that they cannot be their natural selves nor recognize humble virtues in others.

And yet these very virtues which they disdain are the one guarantee which makes free social life possible. If men did not expect to be treated on the basis of the daily virtues there would be much less freedom than there is. Life within a prison must always lack some of the freedom of the outside world, because of the absence of this expectation.

It is very easy for brainy people to take a superior attitude toward humble virtues. But it is certainly impossible for a free society to endure without them.

Perhaps, therefore, it would be more honest (unless indeed we be in the terrible state of ridiculing even honesty) to acknowledge the place of the humble virtues in the social order, and, as a part of that order, to exhibit them ourselves.

Doubtless there is more wisdom in that than we usually recognize.

Remember all the way which Jehovah thy God hath led thee.—Deuteronomy 8: 2.

Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth.—Isaiah 54: 4.

What to remember,—what to forget,—that is the question.

It seems to me that the good things, the heavenly guidance, the help that other men have given us to keep the right path, are the things to remember.

The mistakes, the false leads, the devilish influences, are the things to forget.

Perhaps the people who misled you were sincere. Don't condemn them. Forget their advice.

Can we control our memory and our forgettery?

Not absolutely, perhaps. But the psychologists tell us that the vividness of our memory depends on the stress of attention. Therefore, says St. Paul, " if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, *think* on these things."

Attend more closely to that which is beautiful and excellent. Press it on your mind like a seal on wax. Rejoice in it. Do not be afraid to be glad.

Joy is a great aid to memory. It is a vital principle of all true knowledge. If you know the truth it makes you free, and to be free is joyful. Deep inward happiness is the spirit of true remembrance.

Joseph called the name of his first-born son Manasseh; " for," said he, " God hath made me forget all my toil."

EXPERIMENTS

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes;
But he that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel.
—Proverbs 12: 15.

Even if we had the chance none of us would think of walking into a well-equipped chemical laboratory and starting off on experiments without any past training or present instructor. Not only the danger of such action, but its futility as a means of discovery and its crass dullness would hinder us from it. We wish to acquire at least a preliminary knowledge of what has already been done in this field in order to avoid peril and waste, and to obtain a good start for ourselves.

We should do well to show as much good sense in other matters,—more especially where human growth and development are concerned. And yet many people are loth to observe this caution. They enter the laboratories of education, industry, philanthropy, government and religion, and launch experiments without having any personal qualifications therefor. Unfamiliar with what has been tried and rejected or tested and found good, they launch wild experiments, the consequences of which must usually be borne by others than themselves.

Of course the trial method is the way of progress. Advance is always through the experimental fringe that temporarily marks the extent of knowledge. But the point is that these experiments ought to be made not by any Tom, Dick or Harry, but by those selected men who by patient labour have qualified themselves for knowing what they are doing.

UNSEEING EYES

These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness . . . I counsel thee to buy of me . . . eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.—Revelation 3:14, 18.

He rose from the table where he had been playing cards with some companions on a river steamer, yawned and nodded his head toward glittering expanses of turbulent waters and glorious rugged headlands shining in the sunlight. "You only have to take one look at that," he said in a loud voice, "to see it all,"—and went back to his cards. Throughout the day while the stupendous panorama unrolled before us his eyes were sealed.

Pitiable, you say? Yes, but he is not very different from the rest of us with our blind spots.

One man races through the land in a speedy car and sees little but the number plates on the cars he overtakes. Another man surrounded by a lovely garden or woodland makes no effort to discover their secrets. Another living beside a great library of noble literature glances only at the printed sheet of the passing moment. Another perhaps having made up his mind that certain people are of no account, forever fails to see in them anything worthy of his attention.

Of course there are things which only the specially trained eye can either see or fully appreciate. But most of us possess many more blind spots than is at all necessary.

Unseeing eyes are swift betrayers of an unsympathetic, self-centred heart.

FOREBEARS AND POSTERITY

They are not all Israel, that are of Israel: neither, because they are Abraham's seed, are they all children.—Romans 9: 6-7.

It is a curious fact that many of the things in which men take the greatest personal pride are, as a matter of fact, outside their control.

Take this affair of ancestors, for example. If there is one thing in the world for which we have no slightest responsibility, by way of praise or blame, it is for our parents.

And yet men are continually bragging about certain selected persons among their forebears as if in some way the fame of those men could be bodily transferred to themselves. As if the achievements of a past generation reflected credit on the present generation apart from the present generation's own activities.

Put the boastful descendant of some old sea-dog of an admiral on a heaving deck, or even lay him tenderly in a deck-chair, and he is less inclined for conversation than at the afternoon reception on shore.

Set the bragging descendant of the pioneer in the forest, and the chances are that he'll be walking circles and shouting for help instead of talking about himself in the person of his ancestor with that restrained ardour with which men speak of themselves.

Let the patriot who is so eloquent on the great issues of his famous ancestor's day sit down before the issues of today with equal insight and patience.

Perhaps then the coming generation may find some nearer incentive than our ancestors to encourage them to effort.

For, as Booker T. Washington has acutely observed: "It is easier to be a descendant than an ancestor."

Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.—I Samuel 30: 4.

No one can weep forever, no matter how terrible his grief. The most impetuous of emotional outbursts must come to an end.

With shallow persons, that is all there is to it. When the outburst of feeling is over, they straightway try to forget and go on in their same old ways.

Not so with the man whose heart and hand move in conjunction. He turns from weeping to action.

David turned from weeping at pillaged Ziklag to organize an expedition against the marauding Amalekites. His weeping came to an end and promptly became a motive for action.

Emotion must always be temporary. By its very nature its expression must be brief. Its one enduring power lies in its ability to be transformed into motive.

The question was once asked of Dr. Trudeau whether the feeling of pity was not destroyed by continued living with ill people. His response was: " Pity as an emotion passes, but pity as a motive remains."

Much of the sense of futility in people's lives comes from the failure to transmute their worthy emotions from temporary outbursts into lasting motives for life work.

Until a man effects that transformation, he is only a helpless and hopeless sentimentalist—an inadequate bundle of feelings in a world that demands action.

INFALLIBILITY

No doubt but ye are the people,
And wisdom shall die with you.
—Job 12:2.

It is a strange thing how easily men assume the attitude of omniscience and speak with the accents of infallibility.

And yet nothing is more absurd. We are all subject to error; and the more we strive to master any subject the more apparent this ought to become.

And yet it often seems that we are more eager to speak with confidence than with humility. Sometimes it seems that dogmatism is dearer to our hearts than truth.

Especially is this attitude characteristic of ignorant people, either those who, because of youth, have not yet had time to think widely, or those who, though old enough, have neglected their opportunities.

The first mark of the really wise man is in knowing how limited the field of human knowledge is at best, and in measuring his words and using them with restraint.

For there are few more ludicrous sights in this rather topsyturvy world than a man holding forth with supreme assurance upon a theme which his hearers know to be a doubtful issue. The situation is all the more absurd if it take place in the Professor's chair or the Church pulpit.

There is a saying I often heard at Oxford: "None of us is infallible—not even the youngest."

VOLUNTEERS

And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem.—Nehemiah 11:2.

It was no easy thing to dwell in Jerusalem in those days. A ruined city, a hostile environment, a doubtful political protection from the king of Persia, plenty of hard work sure, short rations and daily perils,—these were the necessary conditions. Only one thing stood against them,—the free will to rebuild Zion. The men who had this free will were blessed by the people.

Volunteers are the aristocracy of Pioneers.

Those who are pushed forward deserve less honour than those who willingly go forward.

A drafted man who obeys cheerfully is worthy of respect. A volunteer deserves a blessing,—beyond a bonus.

Enthusiasm, in the eighteenth century, was a word of discredit. Now, I think, we should call it a word of glory.

Let us ask ourselves what are the causes for which we would be glad willingly to offer ourselves. Let us measure the worth and the strength of our enthusiasms.

If we have none, that will show that we are afraid, or that we are no longer alive.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DEFEAT

Take thy part in suffering hardship, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.—II Timothy 2: 3 (margin).

We are accustomed to regard the great men of past days as easily successful. Ancient issues usually seem clear-cut, while those of our own day look confused and dark.

George Washington and his career appear to us as a simple and glorious record of achievement.

Even if we remember the pitiful retreat of the Continental Army from Brooklyn Heights across the Hudson and the Delaware, or the bitter sufferings of Valley Forge, we forget the stern discipline of defeat through which George Washington passed in the earlier days of his service.

To speak of but two noteworthy instances.

On July 4, 1754, he found himself retreating in a rout from the disastrous expedition which he had led against Fort Duquesne. "Perhaps," writes Francis Parkman, "this miserable morning was the darkest of his life."

But Washington's purpose was not broken. When he had led the remnant of his force to safety he took up again the thankless task of defending the Virginia borders, and for several years suffered not only the hardships of campaign but the scandalous abuse heaped upon him by enemies among his own people.

Yorktown was not the obvious outcome of inevitable events. It was chiefly the fruit of the steadfast character of George Washington, who endured the anguish of Fort Necessity and the Virginia borders and the Conway Cabal and many other trials, and was prepared for victory by the discipline of defeat.

TRANSFORMATION

Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.—John 16:20.

Nothing is more marvellous in life than the way in which things are transformed, so that their very nature seems to be changed, although the things themselves remain.

This transformation may work in either direction. A success may become a failure; a gift, a burden; a privilege, an embarrassment; a familiar friend, an intimate enemy (Psalm 41:9).

Or, a disappointment may turn into a blessing; a load of care may uplift the spirit as with wings; a defeat may become the first step in a victory; a physical limitation may mean enlargement of mental vision; a deep grief may lead to a deeper gladness; an apparent enemy may turn out to be a real and loyal friend.

It is this blessed kind of transformation that Jesus promises to His disciples. The word which He uses to describe it is very wonderful. It means to be created, to be born.

Your sorrow, says Christ, shall be reborn as joy. Evils may come upon you, but nothing can harm you, because you are the children of God. Your trials shall be reborn as victories; your doubts and fears, as stronger assurances of faith; your losses, as gains; your shadowy dread of Death, as the bright rapture of Immortality. You yourselves shall awake in my likeness, and where I am, there shall you be always.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

All thy children shall be taught of Jehovah; and great shall be the peace of thy children.—Isaiah 54: 13.

There is a form of criticism which is very popular today among persons of middle age and older. It is the condemnation of the younger generation.

There seems to be, speaking in general terms, very little sympathy or understanding between these two succeeding generations. But is this not due to the exaggerations of the rigidity of age and the rebelliousness of youth? It is certainly not necessary in the nature of things.

Take two examples from the Bible, and let them be selected from those circumstances where perhaps most of the difficulty centres: What could be more delightful than the relation existing between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi? or between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro? And doubtless as you read this, you also can recall examples of a like happy relationship between persons in succeeding generations.

There is great wisdom in the words of a college student who, in reply to the rather testy criticism of an older man, said: "If our fathers had all the good qualities we are supposed to lack, why have they not known how to impart them to us?"

The criticism of a succeeding generation always implies condemnation of the predecessor,—though critics are not always aware of this.

Perhaps the situation would be greatly improved if each generation learned how to establish in its successor the principles of genuine religion instead of issuing a futile plea for mere imitation.

The great need is for an effective system of religious education.

VINDICTIVENESS

Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord.—Romans 12: 19.

There are few qualities which are more overmastering in a man than vindictiveness. To follow up your enemy with that relentlessness that gives him no opportunity to repent is both socially unjust because of your lack of complete information, and tactically foolish as offering no occasion for winning his friendship.

The only person who is qualified to recompense final judgment is God, the all-seeing, all-wise, all-loving.

One reason why some men have such persistent enemies is because they are continually hounding their enemies to fresh hostilities. They give them no chance to consider in quietness; they offer no opportunity for that gradual withdrawal that precedes the making of peace. They do not see that the victory of annihilation is really no victory at all.

Naturally there are some things which no decent man will permit to be done save over his dead body. But he may resist and prevent the doing of these things without becoming vindictive. He may show a readiness to win over his enemy to become an ally that will prove no small factor in stopping the enemy and may ultimately add a new defender for his cause.

Let us beware lest our enemies prove to be chiefly the creation of our own vindictive spirit.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

When they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James, Cephas and John . . . gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision.—Galatians 2:9.

One of the hardest things in the world is to recognize merit and value in those who disagree with us. This is particularly difficult in religious issues, since religion usually is manifested in strong personal convictions. And it is always difficult for men with strong personal convictions to leave room for the convictions of other people. The instinct to set oneself up as the ultimate standard to which all others must conform is almost irresistible.

And yet when we face the facts of life we discover that there is almost always more than one way of approaching the same spiritual purpose. There is, for example, the way of the formal and literalistic type of mind, and there is that of the poetical and symbolical type. The presentation of the same truth to these two types will necessarily differ, and so will its embodiment. Why not? And why should not each recognize the independent rights of the other? It is not uniformity that the world needs, but unity.

When Paul and Barnabas carried the Gospel to the Gentiles they found it necessary to proceed differently from James and Cephas and John in dealing with the Jews. At first this difference was a cause of dissension among them. But soon, like sensible men, they gave each other the right hands of fellowship and travelled by differing ways toward the same goal with mutual good will.

TYRANNY IS VAIN

Trust not in oppression.—Psalm 62: 10.

For most men, this counsel is a very difficult one to accept. It is peculiarly hard in an age which is inclined to render undue homage to the "go-getter," the man who "produces results." Truly the doer of deeds is a man of mark in any age or civilization. But to set up measurable accomplishment as the test of a man's value, is hardly consonant with all the facts of human life. To worship success as the only goal in any walk of life is to invite men to trust in oppression.

Any work in which men are engaged arouses, sooner or later, active, or at least passive opposition. The invariable temptation for the producing of immediate results is to crush that opposition. It looks as if this were both the quickest and surest way. Most of us are willing to stretch a point of conscience in order to kill the opposition and get a clear field for our purposes. We think we are wise when we are the biggest fools.

For if there is one thing history teaches us, it is that a dead enemy unjustly slain is more alive than ever.

Throttled minorities, silenced opposition, every expression of tyranny must be in the long run self-defeating.

God alone is our refuge, who shall bring us all into obedience to His will.

FAITH

I. A VENTURE

Faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.—Hebrews 11:1.

Faith is a many-sided word. Perhaps by concentrating our attention on its various aspects successively, we may end by being more fully aware of its illimitable glory. It is not a narrower view that we seek but, through analysis and concentration on one point, a truer ultimate appreciation of the whole.

Faith is certainly a venture. Cautious timidity finds no part in it. To exercise faith, the soul must stand up in full strength and reach out into the unknown with reasonable courage and hope. It will not be done without daring. It means taking a chance from the worldly point of view because we believe in invisible and unprovable things.

Some men decline to believe for this very reason. They propose to conduct their lives on the basis that seeing is believing. But is not all genuine wisdom opposed to them? Life demands the venture of faith. Geometry, with its unprovable axiom, philosophy with its accepted postulate, science with its experimental hypothesis, all these bear witness to the rights of faith in human life. And behind them all stands the vital requirement of faith in the religious sense.

To utter the great declaration of faith: "In the beginning God," can never be the logical conclusion of assembled evidence. It must ever remain a venture calling for courage and trust.

II. A CONCLUSION

Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God.—I John 4: 1.

The element of venture is a vital part of faith. But it should always be remembered that faith is not a barren gesture of confidence in a doubtful world, a brave but reckless plunge into the unknown.

No faith in God is worth considering which does not find verification in progressive human experience. Even the beliefs of the past must submit to the testing of today, if they would be accepted today.

The man of faith is not your credulous fellow, easily believing anything without discrimination. He keeps testing his faith, retaining the pure ore and casting out the slag.

Not all that is preached to us is worthy of belief, though it be presented never so fervently. We must keep testing lest our lives become cluttered up with superstitions and prejudices, lest we be left like a rueful child who has captured a butterfly clutching the dead form after the life has fled.

In any genuinely religious faith there must be the discipline of experience. Otherwise religion and life will be separated and immorality will inevitably follow.

Reason can never take the place of faith, but if your faith be unreasonable, a mere defiance of daily experience, it will bring you neither peace nor power.

FAITH

III. A CREATIVE ENERGY

If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you.—Matthew 17:20.

Faith is not only a venture, calling for daring, and to be tested by the progressive experience of mankind, it is also an energy capable of bringing to pass new things. Religion is not just an interpretation of things as they are. It is a means of changing things according to God's will. And faith is the power which effects these changes.

Usually when we sit down in despair and ask ourselves, How can there be God with such terrible things in the world? we ought to be bringing forth our faith as a transforming energy rather than questioning its justification in worldly terms.

Faith, to be sound and whole, must have in it the ability to defy the evidence of things that are and to declare things to come. In itself it must carry the earnest of progress—a new heaven and a new earth.

It is most unfortunate (to pass by for the moment that it is also a profound error) that our age approaches faith from the negative side: Can I believe?

It will be a great blessing when we rediscover that God is always offering to men the power that alone is able to transform ourselves and the world in which we live.

OVER-CONFIDENCE

Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.—I Corinthians 10: 12.

Success is always perilous. The successful man neglects to judge himself. He forgets how far his achievements are due to circumstances or other people. He accepts as his due the popular homage that an undiscriminating world always renders to the successful man.

And—"pride cometh before a fall."

It is worth while for a man to examine himself continually lest, some little leak in the dyke being neglected, he suddenly find himself overwhelmed in the inundating sea. For the only stability on which a man can rely is not his reputation, even when that is founded on his own achievements, but the strength of his character at any given moment as revealed to himself by constant watchfulness. Not a petty introspective spirit indeed, which is always crippling, but sound self-knowledge.

For the margin between success and failure is always very small.

Perhaps it is safest to remember what Sir James M. Barrie said: "We are all of us failures—at least all the best of us are." In that frame of mind we shall be on the watch for those flaws in ourselves which are the beginning of the only real disaster that can befall us.

The man who is in real danger is the man who thinks he is perfectly safe.

TOLERANCE

Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them. —Acts 5: 38-39.

There were times of tumult and disorder in the early days of the Christian Church. But these occasions were, in most cases at least, due to the intolerant public opinion of those days. The mob took it for granted that thought and speech should be controlled by force, and proceeded to practice their prejudices.

A beautiful illustration of tolerance was offered by the great rabbi Gamaliel who opposed his Jewish fellow-countrymen in trying to silence the apostles, and declared that the rightness or wrongness of their preaching would appear if the outcome of it were left in the hands of God.

The same tolerance based on faith in God is greatly needed today. Not that men should be indifferent as to what is thought or said, but that they should have such faith in God as to believe that the truth will ultimately prevail.

At bottom intolerance is the product of scepticism and consequent fear. The intolerant man is afraid because in his heart he does not believe that God has any existence apart from himself. Instead of believing in God he patronizes Him as an extension of himself and goes about in mortal fear lest his own little private theories of life be disturbed.

Surely the teaching of history is plain: There can be no boundaries set to thought; there can be no forcible control of belief.

"The truth is great and shall prevail
When none care whether it prevail or not."

TIRESOME PEOPLE

I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth.—Genesis 27:46.

We hear much today about the necessity of self-expression. But I note that the idea usually is stressed by those whose manner of self-expression has little of interest or value for other people. The kind of man whose conversation is only the by-product of energetic egotism is soon known as a bore. Before his coming men rise up and flee. They know he is come when he arrives, and if they remain for an hour of his talk they will know no more.

What can be more irritating than the feminine chatter that betokens nothing but uncontrolled nervous explosions? How many visits to picture galleries, how many journeys amid great natural beauties are marred by these things!

The presence or visits of such people make the life of a good many households well-nigh unbearable. They are seldom silent, listening or meditating. The slightest stimulus releases the same old story. They criticize, not to improve things, but to express their own superiority.

Is there no good in them?

No; not until they learn that the world does not exist to receive the imprint of their wearisome selves. Not until they learn that there are subtler ways of enjoying life than by making a big noise.

THE SOUL'S THIRST

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
So panteth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.
—Psalm 42: 1-2.

The very essence of life is desire. The only creature who wants nothing is dead.

Now there is a kind of religion that teaches us that all desire is evil. Buddha says, "Whom thirst conquers, thirst the contemptible, for him will suffering grow as the grass grows. Who conquers thirst, the contemptible, which is hard to escape in the world, from him will suffering fall away like water drops from the lotus flower."

A more adequate religion teaches us that happiness and peace consist not in the negation of desire, but in its right direction and use. Furthermore, it tells us that all the humbler thirsts of human life are only parables of the great thirst of the soul for God.

As Spurgeon put it: "When it is as natural for us to long for God as for an animal to thirst, it is well with our souls, however painful our feelings."

The one inexorable thirst of life is the thirst for God. To deny that thirst is to begin the committing of a form of slow murder which involves the utmost in cruelty to yourself and to others.

THE TEST OF REPENTANCE

Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance.—Matthew 3:8.

Our age needs a fresh study of the teaching of John the Baptist. We have forgotten the background of discontent and repentance against which the real value of the Gospel shines forth. We are inclined (at least more frequently than is justified) to view Christianity as an agreeably beneficent manner of life demanding no particular depth of feeling and experience.

The repentance which makes us turn from the sins of our own day with a shudder of revulsion and reach for the Gospel with the eagerness of desperate need is lacking. In its place we find remorse, brief periods of enormous self-pity, passing moments of sentimental regret. Many of us are worldlings, sick at heart, dully aware of the futility of material existence as an end in itself, but without enough of the pioneering spirit to set forth and discover the spiritual continents that await colonists. Our so-called repentance is the substitute remorse that leads to despair and not the resolute right-about-face that leads to a new life.

We need to test our repentance, not by the acuteness of our feelings at any moment, but by the change it effects in our daily life afterwards.

By that test maybe we haven't as yet repented at all!

ON THINKING MEANLY OF OURSELVES

Well done, good and faithful servant.—Matthew 25 : 21.

This word of commendation was addressed not only to the man who, receiving five talents, brought in five new talents to his lord; but also to the man who, having received two talents, brought in two new talents. The two-talented man obtained the same praise as his more talented fellow-servant.

Could there be a more lovely parable of God's dealing with His people?

He is exacting in that He demands of each one service according to his ability. But He is just in that His commendation depends not on the amount of our service but on its relation to our qualifications.

Oftentimes we are tempted to think meanly of ourselves, to despise ourselves as insignificant and worthless. Truly it is well for us "not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but so to think as to think soberly," and yet we ought never to forget that God takes us for what we are and deals with us on the basis of omniscient justice. The one-talented man was cast into outer darkness, not because he did not do the work of a five-talented man, but because he did not even use his one talent.

The worldly conception of greatness does not hold before God. God never thinks meanly of the best endeavours of His servants. He calls us "good and faithful servants" when we make full use of what we have received.

THE TWO GLORIES

For they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God.—John 12:43.

Here is a choice that often has to be made. Will you take the side that seems to be popular, or the side that you know is right?

Many of the rulers, says the Evangelist, believed in Jesus, but they did not confess it, for fear they would be put out of their place.

Many a man in office hesitates to do what his conscience tells him, lest by so doing he should lose his position. Many a private person shrinks from expressing his real convictions, lest it should make him unpopular.

I do not say that if a man sticks to his convictions and stands up for them, he will always come out on top in the long run and be praised as a hero. Sometimes it happens so, but not always. To rely on that is to miss the central meaning of life's challenge.

Which would you rather have, the brief applause of men, or the eternal approval of God?

That is the choice which we must make between the two glories.

THE FAITH OF DOUBTERS

I believe; help thou mine unbelief.—Mark 9: 24.

There are many varieties of religious experience. These arise from the difference of human minds and temperaments.

There are sentimentalists, who can believe anything if it is sufficiently exciting. Their lives are built around an exclamation point.

There are dogmatists, who can believe anything that is definitely and positively stated by authority. Their lives are built around a full stop.

There are natural and inevitable sceptics who question everything and always ask why and how. Their lives are built around an interrogation point.

The man in the text seems to have belonged to this last class. He doubted, yet he believed,—believed enough to ask, and to receive, his blessing.

One of the greatest of English preachers, Robertson of Brighton, fell into doubts so deep that he had to give up preaching and go away into the mountains.

"Yet one thing I believe," said he, "*it must be right to do right.*" Following that star of faith he came back into a more joyous and fruitful ministry than he had ever known before.

Doubt is but fog, however thick. Faith is a light, however dim.

THE DOUBTS OF BELIEVERS

When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.—Matthew 28: 17.

Doubt is not a sin.

It is a questioning state of mind,—sometimes a hindrance, sometimes a stimulus. Which it shall be depends on the way we take it.

If we demand that faith shall be equivalent to knowledge we make a mistake. It is always an adventure,—something that cannot now be proved but may be lived by. If we stop living by it we shall never get the proof.

One of my best friends was a noble man, smitten in the prime of youth with an incurable disease. He always doubted, yet he lived a clean Christian life, and I am sure that he knows now the truth of all that he questioned.

With our finite minds we cannot picture God. Is that an evidence that He does not exist? I should say the contrary.

We cannot clearly imagine the life beyond death. We have not got the factors. But does that disprove its reality? On the contrary, I think it is in favour of faith in immortality.

Most of our doubts are failures or limitations of imagination. These are so natural and inevitable that we should not allow them to make us unbelievers.

VAIN EXCUSES

All with one consent began to make excuse.—Luke 14: 18.

It is always possible to offer a perfectly plausible excuse for doing anything you want to do, or for leaving undone whatever you wish to avoid. Nothing could be simpler. First decide what you want to do, and supply the reasons afterwards.

But of what value is your excuse to yourself? If you avoid the greatest thing in the world in order to carry out some secondary obligation—where does that leave you, regardless of the cogency of your excuse?

No man ever got anywhere yet by explaining and excusing himself. And yet how often we try that road!

No time to live—because we must make money.

No time for our friends—because we have so many social duties.

No time for thought—because we must talk continuously.

No time to grow—because we must "express ourselves."

No time for service—because we must be always pleasing ourselves.

No time for health—because we must be famous.

No time for love—because we will not forget our proud selves.

Empty churches—because of crowded benches and beaches.

God forgotten—because of our preoccupation with idle affairs.

How far do you think these excuses will satisfy our own enlightened consciences when we awake from dreams to reality?

EXPECTATIONS

He gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them.—Acts 3:5.

The lame beggar at the beautiful gate of the temple expected to receive alms from Peter and John. I suppose he was struck by their benevolent attitude and the fact that his plea had captured their attention. But he had no idea that he was to be the recipient of the blessing of healing rather than a stray coin or two.

His expectation was too low. The gift was far greater than anything he had dared to hope.

Do we not all often find ourselves in a similar position with regard to our expectations from other people? Of course we are sometimes disappointed. But are not our disappointments usually in material things? (The lame beggar, you notice, didn't get any money.)

Perhaps our expectations from the men we meet instead of being too high are really too low. Rather than asking for the means to eke out a broken and miserable existence we should seek spiritual blessing. For is there not in all good men a blessing which they are ready to confer on all who will receive it? It may not usually be a complete healing, but it is part of the healing process of life.

I am filled with humility when I remember how many men have far exceeded the poor expectation I have had of them.

IRREFUTABLE FACTS

And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.—Acts 4: 14.

An interesting thing brought to light by the attempt to scale Mount Everest was the fact that several centuries ago when European scientists at the foot of Mont Blanc were learnedly arguing whether or not life were possible on that snowy summit, or whether at such a height any sound could be heard, Tibetan peasants were walking, as a matter of course, over mountain passes hundreds of feet higher.

Lots of things that we consider impossible are daily being done by simple folk who approach them as practical issues.

While men who are somewhat overweighted with their learning declare the impossibility of being born again and the impotence of the spirit in the face of matter, others are testing the power of God and rejoicing in its achievements.

After all is said and done, it is not our theories or prejudices that rule the world. Facts are inescapable—whether we like it or not.

Perhaps it would be better in so big a universe if we took a less theoretical and dogmatic position and acquired a humbly inquiring attitude.

Doubtless, then, we should be spared the humiliating experience of being confronted with irrefutable facts that reveal the inadequacy of our petty theories and systems of thought.

Handle not, nor taste, nor touch . . . are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.—Colossians 2:22, 23.

The trouble with asceticism as a theory of life is that it defeats its own ends. Setting out to be a means of combating the indulgence of the flesh it fails to accomplish its purpose.

The reason for this failure is evident. It is purely negative. It tries to make a man good by pointing out to him only what he must not do. Modern psychology (not to mention ancient religion) plainly reveals the impossibility of this attitude as a sufficient restraint. There is an "imp of the perverse" in all of us. The only feasible way to keep out of evil is to be totally preoccupied with good. Attach yourself to a noble cause, and temptations to all sorts of evil and unimportant things lose most of their power.

There is such a thing as being so concerned over combating sin as to be irresistibly drawn to it. Many a sermon which directs its attack on sin through a lurid description of its nature, only makes it attractive by centring attention on it. The preacher's purpose is good, but his strategy is wretched.

The indulgence of the flesh is best combated by the consecration of men,—body, soul and spirit,—to the engrossing ideal of the kingdom of God.

HATRED OF EVIL

O ye that love Jehovah, hate evil—Psalm 97: 10.

Every emotion of man has its service to perform in the conduct of life. Most of our difficulties come from the misuse or abuse of what in its right use is good.

The terrible revulsions of hatred with their destructive strength have their place. They are the natural complement of the love of that which is high and lovely and pure. The lover of God must hate evil as He hates it.

And that means we must hate it with an annihilating hatred. Most of us are content to grieve over it and cry: Alas, alas!

This will never do. We must not be satisfied to escape the direct clutches of evil. We must launch against it a campaign of extermination. And that calls for all the resourcefulness available in ourselves and in God.

For evil is deceptive beyond anything in the world. Attack it in one place and it slips away into another place leaving the stupid reformer hammering at the door of an empty house.

Do you remember the scourges of white pine blister that destroyed so many noble trees a few years ago? Little could be accomplished by trying to save each sick tree. Only when men's sorrow at that destruction advanced to the disciplined hatred that traced the propagation of the pines' disease to the currant and gooseberry bushes, and set an army of men to root them out—only then was it effective.

So must it be with evil in ourselves and in others. As you love God, hate it till it is dead.

TOO MUCH EQUIPMENT

David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them. And David put them off him.—I Samuel 17: 39.

So soon as Saul had put his armour on David, David found that he had to be rid of that equipment or he could not meet Goliath in battle. So he put off Saul's paraphernalia of war and went to the conquest of his country's enemy with the slight outfit of sling and stones to which he was accustomed.

David was not the first, nor is he the last man to find himself handicapped by too much equipment. Many a man's native skill is restrained by the heavy armour laid on him by foolish friends or by his silly self.

Preachers keep themselves from preaching the Gospel because they desire to make a great display of their learning.

Churches fail to win the allegiance of men because they devote too much time to material equipment. Colleges and schools provide the latest things in dormitories and class-rooms and laboratories, but take too much for granted the teaching and studying that is supposed to justify them.

Parents spend huge sums of money on the clothing of their children, their external manners and appearance and in preparing the positions in life which they are to occupy. But like as not the poor youths will rattle around in it all like dry peas in a pod.

The finest equipment is sometimes only a handicap.

NOT ENOUGH EQUIPMENT

Distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need.—Acts 4: 35.

If some people are so overburdened with equipment as to be handicapped by its weight and the care it requires, it is equally true that others have so little that they are continually working at reduced efficiency.

It may be quite possible for a man to cut down a tree with a penknife, but we ought not to complain if he takes a long time to do it.

The workman in every line of labour is worthy of his tools,—no less the workman in ideals than the workman in ideas expressed through matter.

Did you ever try to think, when you were cold? Did you ever try to grow mentally without the stimulus of like-minded persons? Did you ever try to follow a great thought in an atmosphere of continual petty anxiety?

I enter a plea on behalf of the workmen in ideals—teachers, missionaries, social workers, thinkers. For the most part, these are workers who lack equipment. Being idealists, they are as a class hard workers. But how often the tools of their trade are denied them!—books, fellowship with others like themselves, leisure to think hard and deeply, brief repose and diversion in which their weary minds may be restored and refreshed.

Idealists need equipment as much as any man.

THE PERILS OF AN EMPTY HEART

The last state of that man becometh worse than the first.—Matthew 12:45.

The only possible way to keep evil out of your heart is to fill it with good. An empty heart, like an open door, is an invitation to the passerby to enter in.

Practically all men—a small and fearful minority to the contrary—really long for the good, the beautiful, the true. The pet thesis of the vociferous pessimists ("Christian" and others), that human nature is essentially in love with evil, is the product of a diseased imagination. But that we "all fail and come short of the glory of God" is the judgment of an honest observer of human live.

The main trouble with human nature's campaign against evil is its blundering character. We are so inexpressibly stupid.

We put a fearful strain upon the nerves of our young people by giving them a long list of "don'ts"; but how seldom we implant a living grace. We threaten and cajole and bluster at one another and ourselves, but it is all futile. Life cannot be lived on a negative basis. You cannot seat a child (or a grown person) on a chair and say: "Now be good."

Either fill the heart with good, or evil will inevitably possess it. An empty heart is no more defensible than an empty fortress. Fill it with invincible love and its defenses are impregnable.

PERSONAL CHOICE

Whosoever will.—Revelation 22: 17.

I see that the authorities of a university in Chicago have declared that heredity and environment are nearly equal in shaping human fortune. Good! But these learned men say nothing about the most potent force of all,—personal choice, the liberty of the soul.

Every man has a thousand ancestors from whom he inherits. It is for him to choose which line of heredity he will follow.

In every man's environment there are a thousand influences for good or for evil. It is for him to choose which of them he prefers, and with which he will co-operate.

It is a strange confusion of forces in which we have to live, brother, but it is for each of us to say, personally, whether we want to live upward or downward. Free will can conquer both heredity and environment.

Unless this is true, religion is a vain thing and a mockery.

Christ, consorting with publicans and sinners, taught this gospel of freedom. If you *will* be free and be saved, you can, no matter what your heredity and environment. When the word of faith comes to you, you have your chance.

ABUSING EDUCATION

Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea.—Matthew 18:6

There can be no doubt that the present day rediscovery of the value and possibility in a child is a great event. But there can also be no doubt that this rediscovery is full of peril. Like every natural factor in human life, it can be employed for a good purpose or abused for an evil purpose. The state may insist on education for all its child citizens, but the question still remains as to the nature of that education. Will it be a true leading out of the children's life, or the circulation of prejudice? Thieves also may and do conduct schools for their own purpose.

"To take them young" is a sound principle: for the malleability of a child's mind and habits is proverbial. But how terrible is the crime of those who abuse this fact by inculcating prejudice or establishing bad habits.

Is there any more terrifying sight than to see an innocent little child, unable in himself to comprehend the significance of his conduct, aping prejudices or evil habits of mind and hand learned from parents and other teachers?

And what shall be said of him who betrays the trust and weakness of a child by employing the power of education for evil? He is the most despicable of all men, fit only, as Jesus said, to be sunk in the depth of the sea.

EDUCATING THE WILL

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And even when he is old he will not depart from it.
—Proverbs 22:6.

Education in these days is coming into its rightful heritage of honour. It is one of the good signs of the times. The crisis that hastened the event was largely a by-product of that great catastrophe which we call the World War. We are learning the value of educated men.

Also we have some very interesting data on the weaknesses of the little education we already have. And unless I miss my guess the discovery of most far-reaching social consequence in the field of education today is the discovery that the education of the will must be central to the whole system. Without that there can be no security and no confidence.

We are all familiar nowadays with the failure of the attempt of the older generation to make the younger generation a duplicate of itself. Train, teach, discipline as much as you like—it can't be done with any regularity. One boy may submit, but the next may revolt and go to the opposite extreme. The same thing externally applied may produce diametrically opposite results. The one hope of continuity through the generations lies in the education of the will.

The unity of humanity can be found only in God. Men whose wills are educated to do God's will stand together no matter to what generation they belong. That's why religion is the heart of all education.

ECCENTRIC PEOPLE

If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise.—I Corinthians 3: 18.

To be called eccentric by some people is really a great compliment. For as Ion Keith Falconer wrote in a letter to a friend: "The usual centre is self, the proper centre is God. If therefore one lives for God, one is out of centre or eccentric with regard to the people who do not."

Nothing can be more important for a man than to find the true centre of life and live accordingly.

Before Copernicus it was believed that the earth was the centre of the universe. Then men learned that the sun is the centre of our system. Today the stupendous conception of endless systems towering in illimitable space leads the thought of man out in ever enlarging circles seeking to find the centre of the universe.

So in our thought of human life must we reach out beyond ourselves until by faith we rest in God. Only so can our lives run their true course.

By the worldly man we shall be called peculiar, eccentric. And from his narrow point of view we shall be so. But the pioneers, the men of faith, are always ridiculed and opposed.

The lurid glare of the passing moment does not betray the really eccentric people. Only the calm light of eternity can do that.

EARNING YOUR LIVING AND SPENDING YOUR LIFE

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?—Isaiah 55:2.

Earning your living and spending your life are only two aspects of the same thing.

The mistake that many people make is that they enter the market to sell their talents to the highest financial bidder. In other words they minimize and often totally overlook any other return on the expenditure of their lives than that which can be expressed in terms of dollars and cents.

But there is another sort of income without which life degenerates into a barren and bitter existence. I mean spiritual satisfaction.

The people who perceive this truth and act on it are the truly happy people. While they recognize the need for a certain minimum money income their real payment for labour is found in those spiritual satisfactions which are beyond money valuation.

What teacher would surrender the joy she finds in the achievement of her pupil?

What minister could live save in his secret delight at the youth going on from strength to strength or the sinner directed to salvation?

To set a mere money valuation on your labour is a perilous mistake. For just as surely as you must earn your living must you spend your life.

And if you earn only money, where will you obtain peace?

THE ALMIGHTY RESERVE FORCE

I was brought low and he saved me.—Psalm 116:6.

The ultimate winning of a war depends on the reserve force which can be called into the field to stay a defeat or to clinch a victory.

The same thing is true of the spiritual conflict, the battle of life.

The reason why men and women fail and go under, is because they will not believe in the almighty reserve force which is behind them, waiting to be called.

God is good. If you want to be good, He is ready and able to reinforce you.

I like that Salvation Army slogan: *Down but not out.*

Perhaps you are low in your mind, today. You think you are losing. What difference does that make? Stick to your duty. Fight a good fight. Call up the heavenly reserves through faith and prayer. You shall win at last.

Learn to distinguish between a reverse and a defeat. Learn to put more confidence in the Divine reinforcements.

Exercise the two virtues with which God is always well-pleased,—*humility* and *courage*. Do not be ashamed to ask for help. Use it bravely when it comes over the hill.

WHERE DECISIONS ARE MADE

Far from the noise of archers, in the places of drawing water,
There shall they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah.
—Judges 5: 11.

It is a curious delusion that most of us cherish, the delusion that the important things in human history are wars and dynastic changes and tumultuous public events. As a matter of fact, these things are in reality only the consequences of decisions long since made and now taking effect in the outward world.

The exodus from Egypt and the settling of the Promised Land, for example, are stirring events, but we ought not to forget that they would never have occurred unless Moses, guarding Jethro's sheep in the lonely wilderness of Midian, had first made his decision in quietness.

And so it is with most great deeds. They are conceived in quiet communion with God, though they be carried out amid the stress and tumult of public conflict. Beware of the mistaken idea that heroism or other forms of greatness spring up spontaneously out of conflict!

Long before were the issues decided and in far different scenes. Some poor little schoolroom, some meeting-place of friends, some obscure church, some inconspicuous library—in fact any place where the mighty acts of God are reviewed in tranquility—may enclose a turning-point in the world's history. For there are made, by individual souls, the decisions on which events depend.

HAPPINESS ACCORDING TO JESUS

I

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—Matthew 5: 10.

Even though lots of people confuse solemnity with seriousness, and black clothes with piety, there can be no doubt that the religion to which Jesus calls men has a heart of joy. Jesus has set His approval on the human instinct for happiness.

He calls on men to endure suffering,—but not stoically, grimly, without hope. Indeed, it is said of Him in the Bible that for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross.

Where we men go wrong is not in desiring happiness, but in the manner in which we expect to obtain it. Notice, then, three things about happiness according to Jesus. And today the first:

Joy to Jesus was inward, not dependent on outward circumstances. Those who have entered most sympathetically and understandingly into the experiences of His life, find no incongruity in applying to Him the tragic words of the great prophet: "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And yet He was never broken-spirited. Always we are conscious of His mighty will at work, even when His enemies seemed most powerful. He was never a mere victim, but always a willing sacrifice.

From Him we learn that happiness does not consist in freedom from pain and grief, but in the presence of an inextinguishable joy in the heart.

II

He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.—Matthew 10: 39.

Too often we set out to achieve happiness only to find that it is ever eluding us. Inward joy is not to be captured by pursuit, however earnest. It is to be received as a free gift by those who do God's will.

The joy of Jesus was incidental, in the sense that it was never the object of His seeking. He "pleased not himself," He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister," and therefore joy was His.

Happiness is always a by-product. It never can be anything else. No man can command happiness.

In its superficial form happiness may differ greatly in persons of various temperaments. It may be expressive or even vociferous; or it may be inarticulate and quiet. Noise is not an evidence of its reality. There is such a thing as "the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind."

We never read that Jesus laughed, though we read several times that He wept. His joy was the inward joy, kept living and fresh by the wayside springs, as He made His journey of service across the world. Is that not the heart of meaning in His words: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"?

No man can be happy until he forgets all about himself.

III

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.—John 15:11.

Jesus' joy was not solitary, but social. His life was not centred in Himself, but in the salvation of all men. He looked round about on the multitude with compassion. He rejoiced in the triumphs of other people. When His disciples returned from their successful missionary tour He rejoiced in the spirit and said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth." He declared the joy that there is in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.

There is in reality no such thing as a private joy. There is private greed, gratification, selfishness. But happiness is a social thing. No joy amounts to anything until you can share it with somebody else.

Is there not right here the cause of most men's failure to be happy? We want all our joys to be private personal joys. Instead of rejoicing in the happiness of other people we pity ourselves and envy them. How much happiness we miss simply by failing to enter into the joys of other people or by trying to hoard pleasure for ourselves! We walk along a humdrum way shut up to our wretched selves, when we might be walking a path of glory.

The bigger your heart, the more joy can get into it.

THE GOSPEL OF HOPE

The hope that is in you.—I Peter 3: 15.

If you want to stay Christians you must read the New Testament. Doing this faithfully you will find St. Paul the apostle of faith, St. John the apostle of love, St. James the apostle of good works, and St. Peter the apostle of hope.

Remember Peter's story and you will understand the reason. Three times he denied his Lord. Yet Christ gave him another chance, and he made good.

To be without hope is to be without God. The pessimist is subconsciously an atheist.

If your child goes wrong, do not say, "You are hopeless, you are damned." Say, "You have erred. Repent, and have a hope."

Say the same thing to yourself when all looks black around you.

I hate all systems and theologies which extinguish hope. I accept all disciplines which leave room for hope and encourage it.

Sir Joshua Reynolds painted Hope exultant, springing on the clouds. George Frederic Watts paints her patient, playing on a single string, by the light of a single star.

PASSING OVER

The old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.—II Corinthians 5: 17.

Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe: says the old French proverb. Everything grows tiresome, everything breaks down, everything passes away. But the Christian interpretation gives a new meaning to this sad true saying. It says that certain things do not merely pass on; they pass *over,* and become new.

Exhaustion, destruction, disappearance, is not the necessary fate of the things that mean most to us in this mortal life. Change, indeed, is inevitable. Things cannot stay as they are, nor endure forever.

But there is a power which preserves them even while they change and seem to vanish. This power is regeneration, the new birth.

Thus " the old order changeth, yielding place to new." Thus forms and institutions which once seemed sacred perish to the eye, but cast their life into something larger and better. Thus when the earthly house of our tabernacle, the body of flesh, is dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

If we are Christians, we must believe in passing over.

FOOLISH DISCONTENT

Murmur not among yourselves.—John 6:43.

Smouldering discontent is one of the most destructive fires that burns in the human breast. It eats deep into the vitals of life and consumes more energy than any of the quick blazing fires of passion.

Its origin is usually rebellion against life.

Now it is never going to be possible for men to reconcile or explain away all of the apparent contradictions of life. Every great thing that men have done has been the fruit of faith. While the chronic kickers are grumbling and complaining among themselves, the doers are making the venture of faith and getting results.

Especially is this true in our attitude to Jesus Christ. We will never get anywhere worth going to as long as we debate back and forth on the basis of various texts or opinions about Him. We must settle down to peaceful convictions in our own hearts and lay aside our bickerings.

Where do these endeavours to enclose the infinite in the finite lead us? Only to the misguided zeal of senseless partisanships.

It is better to bow humbly before the mystery of God Incarnate than to argue discontentedly about how and why and when.

Omniscience is not one of the characteristics of men. But conceit is.

Only when we stop our opinionated quarrelling over issues totally beyond our comprehension are we really able to perceive the glories that God is revealing.

DODGING DUTY

The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah . . . saying, Arise, go to Nineveh. . . . But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish.—Jonah 1:1-3.

Jonah was not the first nor is he the last man to run away from the call of God.

That is one of the most popular forms of conduct among inexperienced people. Men think that they can get away from God, that they can forget His call, that they can bury the memory of their religious experiences in a fever of another sort of activity. You may find plenty of such people wherever you are, and usually you may recognize them by the look of their faces, the joylessness of their lives.

Some of them take ship, like Jonah, to a foreign land where they think they will find escape from the duties of citizenship and other personal responsibilities. Others remain at home but draw themselves aloof from needy folk by a haughty demeanour and other barriers, seen and unseen. Others launch out into a wild orgy with boon companions in the mad endeavour to forget the still small voice in their hearts.

O, there are many ways of dodging duty! But none of them provides a lasting escape. For there is no way of losing yourself except in obedience to the voice of God.

ACCEPTING THE WILL OF GOD

Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak with thee.—Ezekiel 2: 1.

The futility of much that is called religion consists in our endeavour to receive it *lying down.*

But religion is not received that way. Resignation is a great word, but it is not to be facilely pronounced. How often we sigh when things go wrong and say dispiritedly: "Oh, well, I suppose it's the will of God." If we really believed it were the will of God we should accept it in quite another spirit.

Sometimes we use the phrase "the will of God" just to cover up our own inadequacy—the failure of rebellion. Sometimes as the utterance of despair. It ought only to be employed with reverent and willing acceptance.

And the prime requirement for receiving the will of God is the attitude of readiness. For the Christian attitude calls for something far nobler and finer than being "resigned to the will of God." It calls for the active acceptance of God's will. We must stand on our feet and hear what the Lord will say unto us, ready to do our part in that will which is not only omnipotent but all-loving.

This is the way of the Christ who came not to do His own will but the will of Him that sent Him, and who received the cross, not grudgingly but willingly, not as an inevitable sorrow, but as the way of salvation.

NICE PEOPLE AND RESPECTABLE SINS

I. ENVY

For envy the chief priests had delivered him up.—Mark 15: 10.

The very sins which finally brought Jesus to the cross are among the commonest sins of our day even among "nice people."

A great many of us for reasons of breeding, training, or natural caution easily avoid the grosser sensual sins which receive most of the opprobrium of civilized communities, while the sins of the spirit, which are the root sins of human nature, flourish among us.

First consider envy.

This is no rarity in our modern life, even within the churches. It is always a leading element in theological controversy.

And how many of our dissatisfactions with life are due to casting envious eyes on the career of somebody else. We fail to count our own blessings because we are jealous of another's blessings.

The plain woman is envious of her beautiful sister. The poor man envies the rich man. The man out of office is jealous of the office-holder.

But there is something worse than experiencing this more or less natural but undesirable impulse. And that is, allowing our conduct to be controlled by envy.

Doubtless the chief priests had many ways of justifying their hostility to Jesus. The fact cannot be hid that they delivered Him up for envy.

Is not the same sin horribly potent today?

II. GREED

What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him unto you?—Matthew 26:15.

The final element in Judas' willingness to betray Jesus was evidently greed, in which the money he received was only a symbol.

Doubtless other elements entered into the horrible decision, but it was greed that clinched his determination.

Nor is Judas the only man who has been thrust into evil by the chink of money in his hand.

It has long been a commonplace of politics, as Sir Robert Walpole said: "All men have their price." But in order to perceive how often this sin makes its appearance we need to remember that the price is only occasionally cold cash. Often it is rank or title, influence or fame.

Not all men desire exactly the same thing.

Nor is it the kind of payment you receive that constitutes the sin. It is the willingness to allow whatever sort of gain appeals to you to control your action—regardless of truth and justice, and higher loyalties.

The one man who is universally respected by decent people and feared by evildoers is the man who is uncontrolled by the motive of greed.

I leave it to you to judge whether greed does not remain one of the popular sins in every age.

III. FALSE WITNESS

For many bare false witness against him.—Mark 14: 56.

Bearing false witness against our neighbour is one of the most popular of our respectable sins. It is the basis of all slander and mean gossip, and is the constant atmosphere of many tea-tables and of a large number of church societies.

It is one of the same old sins that led finally to the crucifixion of Jesus. Not a whit changed in its nature it rears its ugly head wherever men forget or neglect the plain warnings of history.

How easily we pick up the juicy morsel of gossip—quite careless of any investigation of its origin. We shake our heads sadly and pass it along, adding a quaint little twist of our own lest it lose anything in the telling.

It isn't always the language we use that is false. Some of us have "principles" against telling a lie in so many words. But O, how cleverly we can say one thing and imply another! A lifted eyebrow, a smirk,—and somebody's reputation is permanently tarnished.

Nor is it always unkindly intended. Sometimes we are just interested in making a good story.

Decent men and women everywhere tremble at the thought of Jesus on the cross.

And yet how little progress we have made in getting away from false witness which helped put Him there.

IV. SERVILITY

Pilate . . . washed his hands . . . saying, I am innocent, . . . but Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified.—Matthew 27:24-26.

The truth is, Pilate was a coward. He lacked the courage of his convictions. Seeing which way the tide was running in that mob, he tried to still his conscience by uttering a half-hearted declaration of the innocence of his prisoner. Then he falsely declared his own freedom from responsibility in the matter and handed over his prisoner.

Technically he cleared himself—like a weak-kneed sheriff who surrenders his prisoner with a few feeble protests to the lynching mob.

Of course Pilate was in a difficult place. The mob was posing as a band of patriotic citizens, and Pilate was undoubtedly afraid of being called a traitor to Rome. He chose the easier course of bowing to the will of the mob.

Is that rare today?

A young man finds his friends proposing conduct contrary to his judgment. He protests feebly, and then yields, saying: Well, it's your idea and I'm not responsible.

A business man accepts the chance to make a big deal by abandoning his convictions and descending to the conventional standards of business ethics.

A young woman finds herself in a quandary, with her conscience recommending one course and her social advancement another.

Servility? O yes, there's plenty of it right in ourselves.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

I have been crucified with Christ.—Galatians 2 : 20.

This is not the easy and egoistic declaration of a superficial and self-centred thinker. It is the word of Paul who meditated as deeply as any man upon all the aspects of that terrible event on Calvary.

What can he mean, then, by this simple but momentous statement?

What else but that he has so given himself over to Christ, so shared by sympathy in the tragical experience, that it has spiritually occurred to him. Through self-obliterating sympathy Paul, too, has hung in anguish on the bitter cross.

Consequently the crucifixion is not a mere event that has taken place and may now be forgotten; nor is it even to be limited as an important historical occurrence that has its effect outside the concern of the individual Christian. It is a personal matter, something that has a direct bearing on each human being—something that not only has affected the course of human history but which does affect the direction of individual lives in every age.

No man is wise enough to set forth adequately the historical or philosophical significance of the cross of Christ. But that, after all, is not the prime issue before you and me.

Our concern must be so to enlarge our minds and hearts by sympathetic entrance into that terrible event, that we shall find the cross, not a dim far-off occurrence, but a present power for making us dead unto sin but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF RELIGION

Lovest thou me?—John 21:17.

Everyone who reads the Bible is familiar with the striking incident where Jesus three times put this question to Simon Peter. But it is evident that comparatively few are aware of its far-reaching significance.

For instance, do we realize that these three words form an epitome of Jesus' requirement for discipleship? And do we realize that the profoundest difficulties in the way of men becoming Christians lie in the realm of conscious decision and personal devotion rather than in the field of philosophy or science?

"Man, woman, lovest thou me?" is the question that in every age Christ addresses to each human soul. On the answer to that question, spoken in terms of everyday living, everything depends.

The trouble is that many people if they honestly put their answer into words would say:

"No, Lord, we don't love you; that's going too far. But we argue about you, and analyse you into elements of humanity and divinity and explain you in conflicting theories. We spend a good deal of time doing this and, as we're busy people, we have no time left to love you. In fact we have very little time to love anybody. In our opinion love is terribly inefficient and old-fashioned. Some day we'll invent a good substitute. In the meantime we like to use your name because it lends influence to our theories among the unthinking multitude."

It sounds pretty raw, doesn't it? But insofar as religion is a failure today that is the reason. It lacks love.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND OURS

Now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep.—I Corinthians 15:20.

There are few historical events of a distant age that have had as trustworthy testimony borne to them as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And there is none which has had as steady a stream of witness borne to it in every age. The history of the Christian Church is a living testimonial to confidence in that testimony and to a corroborating experience in the human heart.

Doubtless there are inconsistencies in the testimony, as is always true of honest independent testimony everywhere. Even the first three evangelists do not make identical reports. But as to the fact of the resurrection they report with absolute unanimity.

Doubtless also a difficulty arises from the uniqueness of the event. There is nothing with which we may compare it, and, as most of our speech is based on comparisons, it is not easy to speak of the resurrection.

But these are, of course, secondary matters. The historical fact itself remains unshaken. The resurrection was the power that sent forth the Gospel to win the world through the disciples.

Nor is this all. From the first the Christian Church has associated her faith in immortality with Christ's resurrection. This was never a step dictated by logic. It was an irresistible movement of the heart. You will argue about it only to your own confusion. But you will find its complete justification in the Master's teaching about the human soul and the relation existing between the soul and himself.

PEACE WITHIN

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.—Isaiah 26: 3.

The business of the world seems to be carried on in controversy, dispute, conflict, rising at times to the actual horror of war between great nations.

No doubt all this confusion and turmoil comes from the selfishness, the ignorance, the imperfection of human nature, which theologians call "original sin."

The lover of peace is distressed and troubled by the tumult and the strife. He longs for better things. He will not evade his duty or shrink from his part in a conflict between right and wrong. But he cannot live happily or work powerfully without a basis of peace.

Let him find it within. Believing that God is all-merciful and omnipotent, that Christ Jesus came to save sinners, and that Love is almighty and everlasting, he has an impregnable citadel of inward peace. Nothing can conquer or dismay him. He is a child of God.

PREPAREDNESS

Half of my servants wrought in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows.—Nehemiah 4: 16.

This was a large proportion of armed force, fifty per cent of a small community. But then, you see, under Nehemiah the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies who would have asked nothing better than to break it all down and throw the city back into helpless ruin.

Nehemiah knew this, and therefore he acted as our Pilgrim fathers did when they carried their muskets to church.

If all men were peaceful and friendly, pacifism would be the only true orthodoxy. Armies and police would be superfluous and sinful. But while the millennium is delayed, protection is necessary. And protection means preparedness.

In the present state of the world to say, "I will not and cannot resist," is the same as saying, "Come and take what you like." It would not be an incentive to peace, but an invitation to pillage.

But the proportion of armaments to peaceful industries must be determined by the necessities of the time and case.

I have said [illegible], and say again: It will be an ill day for America when we spend more for merely military defense than for the vital education of the people of these United States.

SENTIMENT AS A FORCE

And the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart.—Nehemiah 2: 2.

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, a high office in Babylon. He had heard of the ruin and desolation of Jerusalem, the home of his fathers, the shrine of his faith. This grieved him to the heart and he could not keep it out of his face. It was this deep sentiment in Nehemiah that moved the wise king Artaxerxes to grant his trusted servant permission, and a subsidy, to rebuild Jerusalem.

The most efficient men in the world are at heart men of sentiment.

That is because mankind is more closely bound together by its feelings than by its opinions. In our own day, gratitude for the refuge and help that a poor boy found in books has built thousands of libraries. Sorrow in the heart for the death of a beloved child has raised a new wall against the tyranny of needless disease.

Sentimentalism is folly and weakness. But true sentiment,—feeling for others,—is the greatest forward force in the world.

WORSHIP

And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith Jehovah.—Isaiah 66:23.

The need of acknowledging God over all and particularly the need of performing acts of worship in common with other people is a fundamental human need. The fact that large numbers of people constantly neglect it in no way proves that it is a superfluous gesture. A great many people have always insisted on their right to do things that are essentially bad for them, and to neglect certain things which are connected with their well-being. The mere existence or non-existence of any social custom has little to do with its ultimate desirability.

The act of public worship in one form or another is vital to the social and personal life of men.

Each man needs to escape from the fragmentary nature of his own life into the universal realm which the worship of God reveals.

Furthermore, each man needs to look upon his fellowmen not as competitors or rivals but as men who have their place in God's providence as well as he.

The worship of God with its emphasis on the value of each soul and with its all-embracing view of the universe both encourages the individual to do his part in the world and makes him see his fellows in their right light.

Are you neglecting one of the fundamental needs of your life by failing to join in the public worship of God?

WORK

My Father worketh even until now, and I work.—John 5: 17.

Work is probably one of the chief blessings of mankind. Jesus declares that it is a characteristic of God and of Himself. Consequently it must always be among the virtues inculcated by Christianity.

Vulgar people think that the mark of being a lady or gentleman is avoidance of work and so they attempt to attain the desired rank by not working. The logic is false and the morality is execrable.

Many people also make the error of thinking that work, to be worthy of the name, must be disagreeable. Especially will they regard reproachfully anyone who seems to be enjoying his own labours. If a man likes to work, they think he must be loafing, and by the same inaccurate reasoning, they often identify sulking about a job with working at it.

Work, the actual exercise of whatever talents we may have, is not the only expression of sound life, but it is one of the most important. It is one of the high spots in the life of the growing youth, when he discovers that he has a contribution to make to the world's work. Work is the balance wheel of life both for the able-bodied and also, tempered according to capacity, for handicapped people.

THE NECESSITY OF WONDER

That ye may marvel.—John 5:20.

The state of wonder is a condition of mind most vital to human beings. The man who never marvels is a dull clod at best. He is missing one of the great joys of existence. He shows himself unfitted for life in this universe.

All normal children are full of wonder. But many adults allow that freshness of mind to wear off. I have often thought that this was one of the particular things that Jesus had reference to when He said: "Except ye turn and become as little children ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of God." He was setting the stamp of His disapproval on that hard, bitter frame of mind that looks on life as a mechanical process without room for the exultation of wonder.

After all, the childlike attitude of delighted awe is characteristic of all really great men. The musician, the poet, the artist, is always coming to an unexpected cry of wonder. I shall never forget the thrill in the voice of Professor J. Arthur Thompson, when in a recent lecture he paused and said with impressive simplicity: "A feather is one of the most perfect things in nature." There was a world of wonder in his whole tone and attitude. He was a child crying out with delight before the marvels of God's universe.

Perhaps if we all wondered a little more we would do a lot less complaining.

READY MISINFORMATION

The lips of a fool will swallow up himself.—Ecclesiastes 10: 12.

I stood on the hurricane deck of a steamer sailing out of Boston Harbour one lovely summer evening, watching the graceful manœuvres of a little band of terns over the opalescent waters. Two men came noisily out on deck near me. One promptly pointed out the birds to the other, and in a loud and emphatic voice (evidently for my benefit as well as his companion's), remarked with an air of great knowledge: "Those are what they call chickadees."

From this he turned to deliver himself jauntily of various other pieces of misinformation. But I fled to a remote spot to smoke my pipe and meditate on human nature's irrepressible desire to declaim on all subjects regardless of qualifications for speaking.

We all do it, don't we? Rather than keep silent and humbly enjoy beauty or grace, regardless of our qualifications for commenting on it we prefer to disclose what we are pleased to consider our knowledge. Especially if we think our listeners are less instructed than ourselves are we apt to hold forth with confidence on subjects quite beyond our reach. Unhappily this habit appears not only in conversation but in lectures, books and sermons.

Quite aside from the irreparable damage a man performs in trying to appear wiser than he is, he runs the risk of meeting somebody who knows, where he only proclaims.

Sooner or later the fool swallows up himself.

THE WEAK BROTHER AS BULLY

Blessed is he that considereth the weak.—Psalm 41:1 (Margin).

The problem of the weak brother is a most serious issue to the man who remembers that the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please themselves.

Always bearing this profound Christian truth in mind I want to draw your attention to a much overlooked aspect of the problem.

Oftentimes his very weakness makes the weak brother a bully. He wants the world run for his benefit.

Many a minister is devoured body and soul by weak brothers and sisters. (Not that any decent minister objects to being devoured, provided it does any real good.) And how pathetic is the life of many a faithful daughter of a household because of some weak bully who battens like a parasite on her grace.

Yes, all those who have strength ought to bear the infirmities of the weak; but not so as to encourage weakness. And how much of the sickness of the world is just cherished weakness. It is so agreeable to be cared for. We all have a touch of that love of ease. But do we really help the weak by letting them handicap the strong?

Perhaps you think that is harsh, even cruel? Listen: One of the most gallant and gracious spirits I have ever known lay long years on a bed of pain; but she carried many in her heart, and fed even the able-bodied with the bread and water of life.

WASTING OR SPENDING?

He wasted his substance with riotous living.—Luke 15:13.

I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. —II Corinthians 12:15.

There are three things a man can do with himself and his possessions. He may selfishly hoard them; he may lavishly waste them; he may intelligently spend them.

There can be no question as to which method religion calls on every man to follow.

The temporary nature of earthly strength and riches is plain to all men who think.

What, then, shall a man do with that portion of life and possessions which falls into his hands?

If he tries to hoard it he only fixes his attention on the sure day when he shall lose it all—without profit to himself or others. For the miser is one of the most wretched of men.

If he dissipates it in riotous living he shall speedily find himself (aided and abetted by various sorts of human harpies) in bitter want of even the humblest necessities of life.

Only if he spends it freely and gladly for the purposes of his soul may he experience the full meaning of life and say at the end:

> "Glad did I live and gladly die,
> And I laid me down with a will."

For of what value is strength of mind or body, or what is the significance of worldly possessions save as they are spent for the release of spiritual powers?

As his share is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his share be that tarrieth by the baggage.—I Samuel 30: 24.

David had a little army of six hundred men to fight the Philistines. But when he came to the brook Besor, two hundred of his followers were so worn out and faint that they could not go over, so they were left behind to take care of the baggage, while the others went on to do the fighting and win the victory.

Then those who had been in the front of the battle claimed all the spoil. But David said, "No! Those who guarded our stuff while we were fighting shall have an equal share. They earned the victory as much as we did."

How many tasks and duties there are in life which seem dull and monotonous, yet which are as vital and indispensable as the more daring and romantic adventures! They are humdrum, perhaps, but they are worthy of all honour.

The devoted mother, the good and faithful servant, the patient teacher, the kind nurse, the steady toiler, the loyal guardian of a trust,—these also are heroes. They shall not be forgotten when the Great King distributes His rewards.

Remember what the blind poet, John Milton, wrote: "They also serve who only stand and wait."

ISOLATED IDEALS

. . . *Like a wild ass alone by himself.*—Hosea 8:9.

Nothing is more perilous than an unrelated ideal. It is responsible for the abundant crop of lop-sided specialists who have no conception of the relationship of their speciality to life as a whole, and for the flood of furious fanatics who race through the land. Each of them has usually a noble ideal which he sponsors, but he has forgotten that an ideal taken out of its living environment bears little resemblance to an ideal in actual life. It's all very well to study museum specimens in separate cases, but you don't deal with them that way in the field.

Much is made today of the ideal of personal liberty. But unless that noble ideal is rightly related to the ideal of service it leads only to trouble. What do these personal liberty howlers know about freedom? They have isolated an ideal and thereby destroyed it.

Take again the ideal of faith. We are told that we are saved by our faith. But separate faith from good works and what have you got? An unsupported declaration, an ideal that soon degenerates into intellectual quibbling.

The world suffers today from the dominance of isolated ideals. We must learn to use ideals in their living relationships.

As Emerson put it:

> "All are needed by each one;
> Nothing is fair or good alone."

SELF-COMPLACENCY

They themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding.—II Corinthians 10: 12.

The only really unbearable man in the world is not the egotist. A good honest egotist is infinitely superior to Uriah Heep. The unbearable man is the self-complacent man. The egotist talks some about what he has done, but still more about what he is going to do. The self-complacent man is well-content with what he is. I can see his carefully pursed lips and his sickeningly sleek deportment.

He has Arrived. And he gives you the fearful impression that he believes that all progress ends in him.

Inevitably your spirit revolts against the terrible thought, and you long to run riot in so asininely solemn and inadequate a world.

Egotism is understandable and even commendable where it represents high personal concentration on the matter in hand. But self-complacency is the invariable refuge of small men; the puny attempt to start a reputation by neglecting the canons of good judgment.

If you want to be thoroughly despised, if you want to cut the nerve of all achievement, try being satisfied with yourself.

And if a self-complacent individual is essentially ridiculous what shall be said of those little bands of innately morally superior beings, those "little groups of serious thinkers" who view the common herd from afar?

Truly all the self-complacent are, as Paul contemptuously says, "without understanding."

SELF-DENIAL

He must increase, but I must decrease.—John 3 : 30.

It is too readily assumed among certain thinkers and writers that life is largely a battle between youth and age, between those who are in office to retain their offices and those who are outside to gain them.

That may be true of a small number of vociferous persons, but it is far from expressing the real heart of humanity. Anyone who has had experience with men in various walks of life is greatly impressed with the readiness with which most older men make way for their younger brethren. This is of course most noticeable in those careers which have for their object genuine service to mankind. For the truth is obvious that no serviceable career can be conducted in solitary state and it is equally obvious that provision must be made for its permanent continuance beyond the limits of one life.

The record of the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, His forerunner, is a lovely illustration of this.

Of no one did Jesus speak in higher terms than of John; nor is there a more beautiful story of self-abnegation in all history than John's graceful gesture as he merged his career with that of his Lord and Master and withdrew his rugged personality from the centre of the stage.

Many a man has reason to thank God for the unexpected graciousness with which his poor efforts are received, and for the kindliness with which men of power and influence open up a way in which he may walk.

Self-denial may not be a virtue native to human nature, but it is acquired more frequently than some men think.

SELF-FORGETFULNESS

Whosoever shall seek to gain his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.—Luke 17:33.

A young woman, who recently graduated from college, was making a name for herself in her chosen career. Of course she was promptly interviewed by an enterprising reporter, who asked: "What is the secret of your success?" Her answer contains a great truth: "Really," she exclaimed, "I never take time to think about myself."

So absorbed was she in what she was doing that she had no time for crippling introspection. With her attention centred whole-heartedly on her objective, she herself was lost in her work.

That young woman had found the way of accomplishment, of self-realization.

Somehow we must break away from ourselves. We must get such a hold on life that our little selves are lifted out of self-consciousness and made free and great in self-oblivion.

The common error is to reserve this spiritual law for times of crises; whereas the truth is that it applies to the whole of life.

Just recall the times when you have been both happy and useful. Were they not times when, with a genuine disregard of yourself, you poured out your capacities in a worthy cause?

Is there any reason why it should not be your regular practice instead of an occasional performance?

SELF-GLORIFICATION

He did according to his will, and magnified himself.—Daniel 8: 4.

A popular occupation of our day is magnifying ourselves. It is a sort of endeavour to create an atmosphere of self-respect which we do not feel by talking about our jobs and ourselves in resounding terms.

For example, the other day I saw a poster in a window. It showed a stalwart and handsome young man in overalls with a wrench in his hand, and bore in large letters the inscription: "The Plumber Protects the Health of the Nation."

Well, the only trouble with that sign, so far as I was concerned, was that it promptly reminded me of a plumber who endangered the health of a houseful of people because, as I had the disagreeable task of pointing out to him, he ran the drain-pipe from the kitchen sink uphill.

A good plumber protects the health of the nation,—O yes, but this business of sweeping up the good, bad, and indifferent workers in any calling and praising them in the mass is sheer bunk.

Every honourable calling has its opportunities of service. But to magnify the job apart from the qualifications of the workman only lends comfort to the pride of slackers and shirkers and renders them intolerable to their honest fellow-workmen.

Besides, it's a lie of the most subtle kind.

SELF-RESPECT OR SELF-PITY?

Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father who is in secret.—Matthew 6: 17-18.

Astonishing as it may seem to some of us, it is none the less true that some things are not fit subjects for publicity.

Among the most notable of such things are your own troubles.

And yet how common is the sin of representing ourself as an object of pity. How often we go around collecting sympathy in the most brazen manner, pouring out our troubles wherever we can get a listening ear, and in general adding appreciably to the world's stock of sorrows.

Descending from a mountain-top one summer afternoon, I found myself on the shores of a lovely lake. In a boat nearby sat an old man fishing. By and by, in the manner of persons meeting in the woods (and the fish being apparently otherwise engaged), he rowed over to where I squatted on a rock by the shore. We lit our pipes and entered into desultory conversation. I suppose something in my manner betrayed the wonder in my mind that so old a man should be out on this lonely lake alone, for, fixing me with a quizzical look, he explained: "I'm too old to be much use, but anyhow I calculate not to make trouble for people"—and then with flashing eyes—"At least I'm never going to be an object of pity to anyone."

Wasn't the old man right?

SELF-MASTERY

He whose spirit is without restraint
Is like a city that is broken down and without walls.
—Proverbs 25: 28.

We hear a great outcry in these days against the multiplicity of laws with which most men claim they are needlessly burdened. But we do not perceive enough recognition of the only alternative to increasing legislation,—that is increasing of self-mastery.

We sometimes forget the important fact that legislators also are men and must remain subject to the laws they enact. With the exception of a few men who are afflicted with what has been described as legimania most legislators are only trying to make laws for the protection of public rights. As long as we have large numbers of citizens who accept no restraint on their personal liberty except that which is enforced by law, the number of laws must go on multiplying.

The one security against the sense of being gagged and bound hand and foot in our increasingly complex civilization lies in the development of self-mastery among our citizens. Where there are unjust laws the business of good citizens is to agitate for their repeal; and doubtless there is room for some improvement here. But isn't it about time that we abandoned this negatively grumbling attitude about laws that interfere with our precious personalities and recognize that lots of the trouble originates in the fact that we lack self-mastery?

FOREIGN WIVES

All these had taken foreign wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children.—Ezra 10: 44.

Here is a curious case. The Jews of the Captivity, returning, by permission of the great King Cyrus, to restore their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem, were mainly men. Quite naturally they fell in love with the women of the land in which they were working, and married them, and had children by them. This was contrary to the ancient tradition that the Jews must be a nation set apart, a peculiar people. So Ezra commanded that all these foreign marriages should be annulled. It was probably the biggest divorce decree on record.

As a national policy it may have been prudent. But what I want to know is, what became of the wives who had married in good faith, and the children who had been born without being consulted? Would Christ have approved this casting off of the innocent?

Race purity is a fine thing. It is best to marry one of your own kind. But it is better still to keep your promises and to meet your responsibilities towards women and children like a man of honour.

Can you correct a mistake by committing an injustice?

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—Psalms 22: 1.

There is, of course, a sense in which religion is the most simple and natural thing in the world. But to stop there, is to show oneself blind to the facts of human life and cruel to one's fellow-men.

Take the question of prayer. How sweet and true are the prayers of a child. How naturally he trusts, how simply he speaks! But how hard a man must struggle to attain that childish state! Countless things in himself and in the world about him as he sees it rise up to interfere.

Lowell expressed the difficulty when he wrote:

"I, that still pray at morning and at eve, . . .
Thrice in my life perhaps have truly prayed,
Thrice, stirred below my conscious self, have felt
That perfect disenthrallment which is God."

We need to practice a continual discipline of the soul lest we fall into the futility of identifying religion with external observances.

"That drony vacuum of compulsory prayer,
Still pumping phrases for the Ineffable,
Though all the valves of memory gasp and wheeze."

Prayer is simple and natural, but behind its expression lies the terrible conflict through which the soul is disciplined to meet with God.

STATISTICS

And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel.—I Chronicles 21 : 1.

The taking of a census seems to us a most natural and right thing for a ruler to do. And probably the idea in the mind of the author of this narrative in describing David's census of Israel as a sin is forever hidden from us as a matter of historical knowledge. And yet I think we may at least profitably speculate upon it.

I imagine David looking for statistics to bolster up his faith in the progress of Israel. Instead of trusting in God he was beginning to calculate his own situation as a worldly ruler.

Certainly that was a sin; and what is more, a sin that we are thoroughly competent to understand today because most of us fall under it.

Surely it is well that we should have statistics to indicate to us the places in which growth or loss is occurring.

But may I not ask if it is not a real sin in religion to draw our conclusions from the things which may be expressed in terms of statistics? Is a church progressing or failing simply in accordance with the rise or fall of the number of its members? Is the final proof of religion to be found in arithmetic? Are the largest churches always the most powerful churches? Consider the contribution to spiritual life of the Quakers or the Waldensian Church of Italy!

Can you express in terms of statistics the invincible fact of "one soul against the flesh of all mankind"?

HELP FOR THE TEMPTED

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.—Hebrews 2:18.

It is a curious thing how little even Christians realize the continuous temptations through which Jesus passed. We glance superficially at the formal account in the fourth chapters of Matthew and Luke and think that there is not much to it. We forget Jesus' significant word to His disciples in the last week of His life: "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations." Because we are too stupid to read between the lines of the swift-moving narratives of the Gospel, we overlook the constant assaults of temptations through which He came unscathed.

Again, we fail to appreciate the reality of those temptations because of preconceptions and prejudices concerning the nature of divinity, by which we set Him outside of the reach of real trial.

Could anything be further from the plain witness of the Gospel? Surely the testimony is clear: Jesus stands with men in His subjection to temptation. He stands infinitely above us in His constant triumph over temptation.

And therein lies His ability to help us in our temptations. What a comfort to find, not only a companion in the terrible loneliness of temptation, but One who having Himself conquered, is able and willing to help us!

STANDING YOUR GROUND

Be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them.—Jeremiah 1:17.

The following story is told about Henry Ward Beecher as a boy:

The teacher in the school he attended asked a boy a question which the boy answered. Apparently the teacher was much incensed at the answer and cried testily: Sit down! The abashed boy sat abruptly down. Several boys were asked the same question and gave the same answer and promptly became confused when the teacher voiced his unexplained disapproval.

Finally Beecher was called and gave the same answer as the other boys. Sit down! roared the teacher. But Beecher held his ground and insisted that the answer was correct. For a few moments the teacher stormed at him, but seeing Beecher obdurate and convinced, he smiled and said: Well, boys, you were all correct, but Beecher was the only one sure enough to stand up for it.

"Let no one falter," said Lincoln, "who thinks he is right." It is important not only to give the right answer but to stick to it through thick and thin.

Many a true word has been lost through dismay at the opposition it aroused.

The truth is not always kindly received; and we must learn to declare it even amid the hubbub of denunciation.

THE KINGDOM OF THE SPIRIT

I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.—Joel 2:28.

Religion can never be a specialized department of life like engineering or chemistry where only the technically trained expert may speak with authority. Of course religion has its prophets, those who speak with peculiar authority, but they are not primarily the product of technical training. The schools of the prophets occasionally have a prophet pass through their hands and quite frequently they help him; but prophets also appear from nowhere.

Religion is not a private domain reserved for people of any particular age or class or other human qualification. It belongs to each and all; and leadership in religion belongs to those who, being called of God and possessing the capacities, answer the call and employ their capacities as He directs.

In other words, religion is universal, but all religious men are not equally qualified for the same thing. The outpouring of the spirit means different things for different people. For some it means prophesying, for others the dreaming of dreams, for others the seeing of visions, —and also for those whom the world inclines to overlook there shall be given an outpouring of the spirit.

Religion is universal, but there are distinctions within the realm of the spirit.

LET IT DIE DOWN

For lack of wood the fire goeth out;
And where there is no whisper, contention ceaseth.
—Proverbs 26: 20.

The old saying is that "it takes two to make a quarrel." Let us add that it takes three to keep a quarrel alive. The third person is the "Whisperer," as Solomon calls him.

This is the person who brings new fuel to the fire, and piles on false reports and rumours and malicious interpretations of perfectly simple words and actions. He fans the flame to keep it going for his own pleasure. He has no real interest in the contention, but he likes to watch the blaze and hear the sparks crackle.

For the most part, when two human beings have a quarrel, after a while they grow tired of it and a little ashamed of it. Probably both of them have a dim idea that they were somewhat to blame for it. They are quite willing to let it die down and expire, as it naturally will in the course of time. That is wise and wholesome.

Then, when the Whisperer comes along with fresh fuel to revive the flame, let both parties join hands to throw him and his wood out onto the rubbish heap. That will make the reconciliation complete.

JUDGING MEN

Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did. . . . But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me.—Acts 9: 13-15.

Ananias was judging Paul by his common reputation. Christ by His potentialities. That is the great difference between worldly and divine judgments.

Which was right?

Of course it is easier to condemn or approve a man merely on the basis of what he has done than take the trouble and exercise the insight necessary to perceive what he may yet be capable of doing. But is it fair to him, or even good sense?

Suppose Paul had been judged by the Christian community solely on his past performances, suppose Ananias and Barnabas had surrendered to the popular prejudice against Paul. The Christian Church would have lost her greatest Apostle. The whole course of world history would have been changed. Possibly our land today would be a wilderness and we barbarians.

Tremendous issues are always suspended on our judgments of our fellow-men. Until we learn to judge men on the basis of what they are and may become we shall be continually doing them an injustice and depriving mankind of noble service.

Will you apply that to our usual treatment of men who have served terms in prison? Many a man has been helped to return to an evil career because he is judged by his past without regard to his present state and future possibilities.

How would we like to have God judge us solely on our past conduct?

CRITICISM VERSUS GOSSIP

He spake unadvisedly with his lips.—Psalm 106: 33.

The story is told of a great musician who took his orchestra on tour, and during his travels received a note from a well-meaning person in one of his audiences. This is what the note said: "I think it only fair to inform you that the man in your orchestra who blows the instrument that pulls in and out, only played during the brief intervals when you were looking at him."

How much of our comment on other people's work is of that unintelligent character. If the eagerness and deadly seriousness of our comments were only matched by an equal intelligence and kindness, how much we could help one another.

But no; we would rather say our say regardless of our qualifications for speaking.

And how disgustingly we bedizen our meanness to make it appear as righteousness—like cabaret companions masquerading as lovers. No one is really deceived. There is only a conspiracy among those interested.

The differences between criticism and gossip are obvious: the motive of criticism is improvement; of gossip, injury. Criticism is addressed, ultimately at least, to the person criticized; gossip, to his enemies. Criticism is responsible. Gossip is irresponsible.

Which prevails in your conversation and communication?

COURAGEOUS LIVING AND DYING

Whether we live . . . or die, we are the Lord's.—Romans 14: 8.

From his birth, more than twenty years ago, crippled Johnny had lain helpless in his humble home. His mother, a worn but kindly little woman, who is janitor for several tenements, steadfastly refused the neighbour's well-meant advice "to put Johnny away." Even when the father died or when the young brother, who had just begun to work steadily, met with a fatal accident, still that indomitable mother was obdurate. "No one will take care of him like me. If I drop in my tracks I'll do it."

There was nothing for the neighbours to do but to help as they could. And help they did in the unobtrusive way that humble neighbours have. Now it's a cream-puff which Johnny loved. Now it's a little Christmas-tree with real lights on it or a lily-bulb which he watched with absorbed devotion develop into a perfect flower. Now it's, "I'll stay with the boy while you run over to church this morning." And always the little sister when she came home from school would sit and read him stories from the Bible and other books.

So the lad was dying in the early morning hours and his mother was beside him. "Angel-face," he whispered —that was his name for that careworn countenance— "go and sleep. I'm dying. Tomorrow I'll rest, but you'll have to work. I can die alone. God will help me."

But his mother stayed with him till the end.

"COSMIC PRIDE"

The earth is full of the lovingkindness of Jehovah.—Psalm 33: 5.

Somewhere lately I have read this phrase, "cosmic pride," and it sticks in my mind.

Pride may be good or bad according to its source. To be proud of yourself is a despicable emotion. But to be proud of your friends' achievements is noble.

The reason why pride usually connotes evil is because it is almost exclusively associated with fatuous self-esteem. And there are few more disgusting emotions than that.

And yet there is such a thing as justified and worthy pride, especially when it is inclusive rather than exclusive.

When a man performs an heroic deed we are all stirred with pride to be men to whom such deeds are possible. We need more pride of that sort.

We need the emotion that makes us proud to be living souls in this magnificent universe. We need news from India and China and Europe and the islands of the seas that will stir us to cosmic pride—just as they need like news from us.

And such news does come. And I venture to say there is no insuperable barrier against its coming increasingly until all small and local prides are smothered in the generous emotion of cosmic pride,—when all men shall perceive that the earth is full of the lovingkindness of Jehovah.

EXTINGUISHING THE SPIRIT

Quench not the Spirit.—I Thessalonians 5: 19.

The quality that distinguishes man as a moral being from all the animals is his ability to commune with God, the fact that the Holy Spirit may dwell in him.

But the mere fact that man has in himself the possibility of being the peculiar abiding place of the Spirit is no guarantee that he is such. There is too much talk about this issue in the abstract and too little attention paid to the question of whether or no the Spirit is present in any particular man.

The truth is that many of us defend the spiritual greatness of mankind by pointing to certain distinguished men and women, while so far as our own lives are concerned we are consciously or unconsciously extinguishing both the warmth and light of the Spirit.

For there are just as many ways of quenching the Spirit as there are of spoiling a camp-fire.

Obviously you can extinguish it by neglect, by failing to supply wood for burning, or by placing it wrongly for the flames to take hold, or by employing the wrong kind of wood—green for the beginning or dry for its continuance.

And equally surely you can destroy any kind of fire by fussing over it. As soon as you have it laid one way change it to another before the flames have a chance. In a little while the baffled flame will retire in disgust with a puff of smoke.

In like manner the Spirit in a man which is fussed over or neglected will go out, leaving the doleful spectacle of a lifeless hearth.

A FRIENDLY CORRECTION

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more accurately.—Acts 18: 26.

It is the easiest thing in the world for the man whose life-work calls on him for constant speaking with authority to be utterly unconscious of certain gaps in his knowledge. Particularly is this true of the teacher, preacher or newspaper editor. Happy is such a man who has friends like that lovely couple, Aquila and Priscilla.

When they found something missing in the knowledge of that brilliant and eloquent preacher Apollos "they expounded unto him the way of God more accurately." But, mark you, how they did it. "They took him unto them." No public ridicule; no endeavour to "show up" the ignorance of the young and enthusiastic preacher. "They took him unto them."

Let your imagination play on the scene. I can see that devout and kindly husband and wife inviting the preacher to supper and launching out into a private and friendly conversation which was to make still more clear to him the way of God. It is a beautiful picture and one that lingers in the memory.

It reminds us how easy it is for a busy man to have incomplete knowledge even of his own particular subject; and how dependent each man is on other people for full and balanced knowledge; and finally it affords a lovely instance of a delicate and kindly way of imparting new knowledge.

How much more effective corrections are when given in that manner!

CONVICTIONS AND ENVIRONMENT

After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, ye shall not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, ye shall not do. . . . Mine ordinances shall ye do.—Leviticus 18: 3-4.

One of the most pitiful weaknesses of men is our inclination to fall in with the customs with which we find ourselves surrounded. It always requires effort to oppose environment, and often it demands real courage.

It is so much easier to go with the current than to fight it. Usually it is less painful to still the protest of conscience (especially if we do it habitually) than it is to stand alone or with two or three against established custom.

Look how quickly even "nice people" let go of their principles when they find themselves in strange surroundings.

In truth there can be no greater trial of conviction than is to be found in an environment which lends it no support.

And yet to decide by inward conviction and not by outward circumstance is the very thing that as religious men and women we are called to do.

In this age we are constantly finding ourselves in such trials. Very few communities are entirely homogeneous, particularly in regard to religious observances. And how few there are who under these conditions stand fast by their convictions.

No wonder that strong personal religion is a rare and highly treasured thing. For its very foundation stone is unwavering loyalty to God's voice in the soul without regard to environment.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.—Daniel 3: 17-18.

This statement of the three men ordered to conform against their consciences to Nebuchadnezzar's decree, is a perfect illustration of the attitude of faith. They hoped, even expected that God would save them from the fiery furnace with which they were threatened; but their devotion to God was not dependent upon the fulfilment of that hope. Even before the event, they had considered the possibility that their hope would be thwarted and had put themselves on record as refusing to conform to the king's order under any conditions.

It was a bold whole-hearted decision, made in the absolute realm of the spirit without regard to the outcome in worldly affairs.

We need more decisions of that sort today. It is so hard to have confidence in leaders who always have their ears to the ground to find out what will be the effect of any course of action, before they adopt it! It is so hard to trust teachers who never say anything which does not receive popular applause!

In every realm of activity, we need men who will act, not on the basis of what consequences for themselves may be involved, but on the basis of unshakable religious conviction.

AN EVIL CONSCIENCE

The wicked flee when no man pursueth;
But the righteous are bold as a lion.

—Proverbs 28: 1.

An evil conscience is a terrible companion. It transforms every shadow into a lurking peril; it multiplies every sound into the footsteps of an avenger. The man who has violated his conscience is continually in a panic. The wicked man knows that the universe is against him, and he is always on the watch lest he be undone. He dare not put his trust anywhere save in himself. He must be ever on the alert and often he finds himself in flight before his own conscience from which he can never altogether escape.

On the other hand, nothing gives boldness to a man like the knowledge that he is right. The safety of the good man depends, not upon escape, but upon standing his ground and raising a banner for the rallying of the forces of righteousness.

Before a man starts in on the desperate game of plotting evil in a world planned by God for the organization of righteousness, let him recall his boyhood experiences. Let him remember the horror that dogged his steps when he crept into his home in silence and darkness after an evening of deliberate evil. How terrible was the moon, like an awful eye of God looking in his window! And the next day, how he started if some one spoke to him unexpectedly! And how killing was the kindness of his mother who thought he looked a trifle pale and might have caught cold!

No; these are not illusions. They are the evidences that an evil conscience is the one enemy that can injure man.

CONCENTRATION AND SELF-CONTROL

Every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.—I Corinthians 9:25.

If one may judge by his references to them in his letters, the Apostle Paul was a great admirer of the athletes who took part in the running, boxing and wrestling contests of his day.

What accounts for the tremendous interest of this spiritually-minded man in these pagan athletes?

Is it not to be found in their single-hearted concentration on their objectives and the self-control which they exercised in seeking to attain them?

Paul saw the supreme importance of these qualities and only regretted that while men showed such noble zeal to win a corruptible crown, they were unwilling to exercise themselves similarly for the incorruptible crown of life.

There is an element of great pathos in his words. He utters generous tribute to that fine body of young men who, with attention riveted on the wreath which was the victor's award, went through ten months of hard training (according to regulations) and, even further, "exercised self-control in all things." But he cannot overlook the incompleteness of these physical and mental specimens, nor forget the dissipated nature of Corinthian life.

Concentration on the goal and self-mastery as the means of getting there are vital to spiritual achievement.

Is it not evident that much of our spiritual futility is due to our distracted attention and consequent unwillingness to exercise self-control?

THE FOLLY OF CONCEIT

Great swelling words of vanity.—II Peter 2: 18.

Vanity (which in its derivation means emptiness and unreality) is one of the most corrosive elements that ever get into the metal of life.

It takes perfectly good specimens of men and women and turns them into hollow shams. It makes us trifle with seeming rather than deal with reality. It makes life a welter of confusion, and consumes more energy than is required to do many noble deeds.

The famous William Carey, in one of the stories he translated out of the Indian dialects, offers us an amusing commentary on vanity.

He tells of a frog who while crossing a road was terrified by the approach of an elephant. Trembling, he hid till the great animal passed by, and then, hearing some one say on looking at the tracks: "How huge an elephant must have gone this way," he hopped out and said: "We quadrupeds are wont to leave such footprints."

How true to life that is!

Vanity always consists in claiming for ourselves something we haven't got.

How ridiculous is the uncovering of conceit!

And how exquisite is the discovery of true worth and its unadvertised enjoyment!

IMMORTALITY

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life.—John 11:25.

One reason for our confusion in thinking about immortality is due to two fundamental errors in approaching the subject.

In the first place we think of it as indefinite extension in time. And naturally the mind staggers aghast from the awful contemplation of years without number like the grains of sand on the beach. There is nothing spiritual about that crassly material conception.

It is not mere quantity of life measured in terms of extent that the soul needs. It is rather a quality of life.

Again we think of immortality as permanence of condition, and we develop astonishingly grotesque ideas of a future life. From these conceptions most thoughtful souls revolt:

> "She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,
> To rest in a golden grave, or to bask in a summer sky;
> Give her the wages of going on, and not to die."

What we need is that which is at the heart of Jesus' teaching and personal witness: the indestructibility of the soul for the sake of its own perfection and growth, and for the infinite value of its relationships with other spiritual beings like ourselves, and especially with God.

Concerning this vital knowledge we can learn nothing by the silly game of spiritual peeping and prying. We must turn simply to Him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

CONCEALING DIFFICULTIES

When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen of men to fast.—Matthew 6: 16.

Most people like to have their activities noticed by other people. Nor can I find anything wrong in that liking. The orator desires his words to be heard; the painter wishes to have his pictures regarded; the host delights in the happiness of his guests. The man who doesn't care whether his doings are appreciated is a queer, unsocial fellow, to say the least.

But there is an attitude abroad which is the very reverse of this wholesome and natural concern in other people's interest in our work. I mean the sentimental attitude of drawing the world's attention to all the difficulties through which we have had to pass in achieving our results.

There is no call to advertise our fastings and tribulations. Let the finished product speak for itself. Why all this laborious explaining of processes, this emphasizing of difficulties? What has become of the true artistic instinct of concealing the pains and letting the glory of the achievement be its own witness?

Does any full-grown human being need to be told that every worthy accomplishment requires sacrifice and fasting? Can we not rid ourselves of reducing life to a publicity problem?

Where is the man of whom it can be said:

> " His action won such reverence sweet,
> As hid all measure of the feat "?

SOCIAL JUSTICE

I. CHARITY

Your abundance being a supply at this present time for their want.—II Corinthians 8: 14.

There can be no question but that charity is an important virtue in a world where some men have more than enough and others are in want. No one can have much experience of the world without perceiving both the need for charity and the moral obligations to practise it.

In our days charity is highly organized and some of the ablest people are engaged in the difficult task of administering it.

And there are very few people who are not in some degree concerned in the giving of charity. But right there is one of the great difficulties. Comparatively few people give with any distinct purpose in view. For many people charity consists in giving away some small portion of surplus after they have spent all they wish on themselves. By some charity is only practised for the selfish purpose of satisfying their own benevolent feelings.

One hears it said that ten per cent of one's income should be given away. Our income tax law provides for exemption from taxation of fifteen per cent given to charitable purposes. But these are only endeavours to regularize from the side of giving and not on the basis of need.

Christian charity must steer a careful course between pauperization of its recipients and mere selfish gratification of its donors. It must be based on willingness to make sacrifices and a sympathetic respect for all men.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

II. STEWARDSHIP

Who then is the faithful and wise steward?—Luke 12:42.

The injunction to give a portion of our possessions for the benefit of those who are in need is far from being the last word that religion speaks on social justice. We are called to a higher obligation than charity.

There are, of course, those who claim that when religion teaches the secondary virtue of charity it has nothing further to say about a man's possessions. But any man who thinks seriously on the issue knows that our responsibility does not end with what we give away. The question of how we spend what we keep for ourselves must also be faced.

And here the magnificent obligation of stewardship arises in the mind of every thoughtful man. It will not do to divide our possessions into two heaps—even if those heaps be equal in size—and say: This is for God; and this is for myself. Both heaps belong to God, and both must be administered for Him. In the expenditure of both must run the same purpose of service to Him.

No doubt this is a far harder thing than the mere giving of a certain per cent of our possessions to worthy causes. But there can be no question but that it is the only condition on which genuine moral integrity is possible for a thinking man.

Let each man ask himself: Do all my expenditures, personal and charitable, represent the administration of a trust fund given into my hands by God?

III. MAKING MONEY

To do righteousness and justice
Is more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice.
—Proverbs 21 : 3.

Behind the issues of charity and stewardship there is still a further question for the religious man to face. For charity and stewardship deal only with the administration of possessions already in hand. And behind the obligation of faithful expenditure and generous giving is the question: How do we earn or obtain our possessions?

If a man is making money in ways that involve social injustice can he in any way be called religious if he administers it well?

This is not the secondary issue of "tainted money." It is the profound issue of religion's concern with social justice.

If we are to be religious in a sense that has any real significance we must be as much concerned over the manner in which we obtain money as over the way in which we expend it. Let any man who is in doubt on this issue re-read his Bible, especially the prophets, the Gospels and the Epistle of James.

It is so much easier to be "generous" after we become rich than to let the chance to make money go by because it may involve social injustice. And yet the logic of the facts forces us back step by step to face this great obligation.

And until we go the full length and deal not only with the giving and spending of money but with the earning of it religion is only scratching the surface of our lives.

A HEART OF COMPASSION

Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion.—Colossians 3: 12.

There is a beauty in words, as real as the beauty of things. It does not come to us through sight, but through the inward vision of their meaning and the finer sense of their associations.

Compassion means something more than pity, and therefore it is more beautiful. It means not merely being sorry for people in trouble, but being sorry *with* them. It implies a sharing the grief and distress of others.

It is said of Christ that when the leper came to him for healing, " being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand and touched him," and he was cleansed. Again, when the crowd of people has followed Him into the wilderness, weary and hungry, Jesus says, " I have compassion on the multitude." Again, He was " moved with compassion " when the two blind men cried to Him, " Lord, that our eyes may be opened." Again, when He met the widow of Nain mourning for the death of her only son, Jesus " had compassion on her " and said unto her " Weep not." Again, as He went about the cities and villages healing the sick and the afflicted, " when he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd."

It is a heavenly quality. God Himself is full of compassion. No one else in the world is more sorry with us in our sickness and suffering than He is. It was to show us this that Christ came.

To have a heart of compassion is to grow into the divine likeness.

THE UNCHANGEABLE CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever.—Hebrews 13:8.

Variety, the old proverb says, is the spice of life.

It is a good proverb but it avails only in the realm of secondary things, for nobody expects to live on spices.

The more deeply we reflect on life the more insistent becomes the need for something unchangeable. All of us dwell continually amid the natural changes of the inner man. Most of us pass through many changes in outward condition during our lifetime. And even when those changes are few they do not reveal the stability for which our heart really seeks.

What we need with an agony of longing that cannot be uttered is the confidence that behind the outward phenomena of life there is a spiritual reality which is forever the same. Philosophy may increase its power to enfold the universe in its understanding. Science may advance victoriously into as yet unknown realms. But goodness will be forever the same.

How do we dare hold such a faith which alone gives unity to our life and binds in a beloved brotherhood the honest men of every age?

Is it not by looking unto Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever? No matter from what racial background or through what philosophy He has been viewed He remains always the same.

Amid the ebb and flow of thought and knowledge, the flux and uncertainty of life, He is the one sure resting place of the soul in its instinct for permanency.

THE SECOND LOOK

Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. . . . they left all, and followed him.—Luke 5: 8, 11.

There is always a crisis when a mature human being first comprehendingly meets Christ as a living personality. The contrast between a man and the divine Son of God is overwhelming. Power and holiness stand out against feebleness and sinfulness. We are filled with awe and shamed with the knowledge of personal unworthiness. The memory of our sins rebukes us. Our thwarted and neglected and denied aspirations are recalled. We are smothered in anger and grief. And our first inclination is to be rid somehow of this disquieting Presence. In natural human agony, we cry, "Depart from us for we are sinful men, O Lord." All the depths of our souls are shaken and our first prayer is to be rid of the horror it brings.

But there is a world of difference between the first and second looking at Christ. The first repels by the grandeur and holiness it reveals. The second draws by persuasion and attraction. It is the same Christ—but more fully comprehended in His purpose of salvation.

The trouble with many of us is that we stop at the first view and miss His comforting "Fear not" and overlook His challenging commission. In our secret hearts we are afraid because we have not looked again and left all and followed Him.

CHILDLIKENESS

Except ye turn, and became as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.—Matthew 18:3.

Doubtless most children look forward with pleasurable anticipations to growing up, and some even long to be like what they suppose you and I are. But equally certainly do we look back with yearning to what children are. Now if the business of being an adult were an inevitable progress from innocent simplicity to sophisticated self-consciousness, life would indeed be a process of disillusionment. And indeed it is true, as all poetic souls have realized, that growing up into a recogition of limitations is an inevitable experience. Therein lies its real pathos.

But you will observe, if you meditate quietly on Jesus' words, that He does not call on us to perform the impossible and wicked feat of remaining children. He does not bid us check growth, physically or mentally. He nowhere presents the kingdom as the possession of childish folk. He invites us, when we have gone through the deep waters of growing up to " turn and become as little children " in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

That, by God's grace, is not only a possibility but a necessity for the human soul. It means turning from worldly wisdom to the heavenly wisdom of faith on which all real knowledge is founded. It means finding in the experience of forgiveness the adult counterpart of childhood's innocence. It means looking at all people and the world itself through the fresh eyes of a new spiritual birth.

SEASONED SPEECH

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer each one.—Colossians 4: 6.

This counsel was directed in the first place to the manner of answering critics of Christianity. But like all valuable counsel it has a much wider application than the particular circumstances that drew it forth.

Look at it as it bears on all speech—especially conversation. It proposes two ingredients for what a man shall say—grace and salt, courtesy and piquancy. Speech ought to be kind and considerate but not flat and platitudinous; it should be salty, but leave no distasteful sting.

Graciously stimulating conversation is one of the most valuable and agreeable things in the world. Alas, in these bob-tailed, hustling days, it is a lost art save among a few intimate friends. People are much inclined to say their say dogmatically and then go on to the next listener. We need to remember that the object of speech is not the mere speaking of our minds or even of the truth. Much depends on the manner of our speech. Grace and salt are necessary unless even the truth is to create enemies rather than win friends.

Let a man not only consider what he is to say, but let him be alert to say it with pungency and kindness that it may have its best effect.

UNFOUNDED CERTAINTY

They laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.—Luke 8: 53.

You know the kind of man who is always coming around and "facing you with the facts"? The world to him is a closed system of law to which he holds the key. Is this or that possible? Ask him—and he'll show you the facts.

If you press him hard as to where he got his facts, he will probably decline to explain,—but he will assert his facts more vehemently than ever.

He poohs-poohs all talk of things which cannot be perceived by the senses. He calls himself a practical man. No illusions for him!

But what are these facts which he so strenuously proclaims? With all our vaunted knowledge what an infinitesimal fragment of this universe has been examined by the mind of man! And how short is the period during which we have watched the working of what we are pleased to denominate universal laws!

In the midst of aeons of time and infinite space it is fitting that we should occupy ourselves with humble inquiry rather than spurious certainty.

The men who laughed Jesus to scorn in the presence of what to them were irrefutable facts revealed rather the inadequacy of their knowledge than the correctness of their facts.

Don't you wonder how they felt later when they met the little girl playing in the village streets? Probably they were still unconvinced and unrepentant, for the human mind is terribly tenacious of its own prejudices.

CEREMONIES VERSUS MORALITY

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. . . . But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.—Amos 5:21, 24.

Ceremonies are an important part of public religion. Informal ceremonies may be just as much of a ritual as formal ones. Even the careful avoidance of all ceremony is really as much of a ceremony as the most elaborate service. It is not the way in which we worship God that matters; but whether or not we worship Him at all.

What Amos is denouncing is not formal worship, but ceremonies divorced from morality. That men of iniquitous life should perform the ceremonies of religion without qualms as to their conduct, can only be intolerable to God. For religion, in any vital sense, begins not with occasional observances, but with an effect on the whole life. Apart from that effect, ceremonies are nothing but hypocrisy.

There is always a day of disaster for nations or individuals who keep up the forms of religion but neglect its moral content.

Despite popular belief to the contrary, it must be better to neglect the ceremonies of religion than its living embodiment in daily conduct.

Where pure religion is found, ceremony and morality are interfused in the earthly integrity of soul and body.

CENSORSHIP AND CHARACTER

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.—Ephesians 6: 11.

Shall social reforms be established by censorship or by the inner protection of character? For the most part men are partisans and argue the absolute necessity of the particular side which they have chosen without regard to the other. Good men are to be found on both sides, as usual. And, also as usual, the best men are to be found recognizing justice in both positions and trying to work a plan of procedure that will in the first place accomplish the desired effect.

There can be no question but that society rightly demands that temptation be not unnecessarily flaunted in the public face—especially in the face of children and inexperienced people. That requires a degree of censorship.

On the other hand, all men who know something of human nature, particularly as found in themselves, know that the only final defense against temptation is the inner refusal of a man's soul, prompted and given strength by God. The chief help that censorship can lend to this defense is in warding off temptation until the soul is mature and strong enough to stand by itself. That form of censorship must be primarily the censorship of parents and teachers supported by such laws as they may honestly require.

Innocence cannot be legislated. In grown men and women it can only be the result of a deliberate choice of whatsoever things are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

WHO'S TO BLAME?

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings.—Proverbs 22: 29.

I once spent a winter week in an inn in an old New England farming district. One afternoon, with several others, I stood by the stove in the country store. As a visitor I listened carefully to the conversation, only saying enough to indicate that I was listening as a friend. There were many deserted farms in the neighbourhood (I was told), and "big business" was destroying the chances of the simple and honest farmers. There was much grumbling and complaining, but no plan of action was proposed.

On several days after that I walked around the countryside, and this is what I saw: Mosquito netting flapping in the wintry blasts at the door of almost every house—evidently left to be tattered after its summer service; an automobile equipped with a full set of good tires with only a few minor accessories missing, left to fall to pieces beside the road directly across from an occupied farmhouse; an almost new farm-tractor and dumping wagon standing in a lurched attitude and blanketed with the first snow in a field about a hundred yards from an open barn-door; a hammock swaying wildly between two leafless maple-trees in front of a roadside farm, lashed by a stiff breeze and a temperature of two degrees above zero.

I suppose men will always complain of the oppressions they suffer; and God knows, often enough their complaints are just. But when you find things like these you sometimes wonder whether the oppressor is some mysterious outsider or just native incompetence.

BEFUDDLED ORDERS

If the trumpet give an uncertain voice, who shall prepare himself for war?—I Corinthians 14: 8.

I was shown a letter the other day which stated that some society voted to appoint "a temporary, provisional, preliminary regional committee composed of approximately forty persons, approximately one-half of whom shall be women," etc., etc.

It doesn't matter what it was all about, the fact remains that you can't get around the tentative nature of the proposal. Apparently this meeting had "wanted to do something," and being either unable to decide what to do, or unwilling to commit itself very far, had taken this inane method of "voting something" that meant nothing.

It is typical of much present-day procedure. We all want what we call progress, or results; but most of us are scared to commit ourselves to anything. We hedge action around with such a mass of verbiage that there's certain to be some loophole for escape if we decide to turn tail later.

In trying to reconcile open diplomacy and pure democracy with the getting of results, many little groups of serious planners seem to be floundering in a maze of words and phrases that may mean anything anybody chooses, when the hour strikes.

Who wants to serve on a "temporary, provisional, preliminary committee"? If we can't get any further than that, why delude ourselves into thinking we have done anything except reveal our own befuddlement?

SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY

And they were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes. —Mark 1:22.

This seems a very strange statement. Considered closely, it is just the reverse of what we might have expected. For the scribes were "the authorities," the regular professors of theology and ethics, the established interpreters of Scripture and the censors of public morality. Whereas Jesus was just a plain man of the people, who came from a carpenter's shop, and had no title or rank or wealth in the world.

Yet His voice came into the religious controversy and fog of the time like a clear wind from heaven, His teaching amid the darkness of the doctors was a Divine word creating light. Men were not confused when they heard Him. They were either convicted and became His foes, or converted and became His followers. The quiet power of His speech was a living force among the souls of men.

Whence came this authority? Undoubtedly from God, whose beloved Son and personal Messenger He was. But on the human side we find three things in the teaching of Jesus which are sources of power.

First, knowledge; direct, real experience of God. Second, sincerity; the straight and simple utterance of a heart loyal to the truth. Third, love; "I will give you rest."

We need more of these three things if we desire, as followers of Christ, to speak with authority.

AT HOME IN THE WORLD

Surely Jehovah is in this place; and I knew it not.—Genesis 28: 16.

Many people suffer greatly because they are unable to find themselves at home in the world. They rush restlessly from one thing to another, always dissatisfied, rarely at peace.

It is true that we are but sojourners in this world. None of us can ever be permanently satisfied here unless we disobey Paul's clear injunction: "Quench not the spirit."

There must ever be a conflict within man. As I heard it skilfully described the other day: "Man is a migratory creature with an instinct for permanence."

And yet the homing-instinct can be satisfied here and now if we seek its fulfilment not in outward circumstances but in inward reality. After all, this is God's world, and as living souls in it we have a course to run and relationships to fulfil.

It is not so much the impermanence of outward things that gives us the feeling of being adrift and lost in the failure to realize the presence of God with us.

When once we grasp the truth that it is the things which are not seen which are eternal then we can pitch our tents each night with good cheer and enjoy even the passing pleasures of the moment.

For we shall be at home in the world knowing the one thing vitally necessary to the peace of man: God is with us.

YET NOT

We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed.—II Corinthians 4: 8, 9.

Evidently Paul was not a Pollyanna optimist. He did not imagine that the world is altogether good, and life wholly pleasant, and sickness only a mental error, and sorrow only a phantom. He faced the hard facts of existence; he felt "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune;" he was often troubled, and sometimes distressed. But he never surrendered to sorrow. He refused to cross the boundary line from grief into despair. In the darkest, stormiest waters he held fast to the life-line of hope.

He tells us that the way in which he succeeded in doing this was by remembering vividly the sufferings and death of Jesus, and trusting absolutely in the life of Jesus to be made manifest in our body.

This line of sharp distinction between suffering and surrender, which is drawn in the text by the words "yet not," is a good line for us to follow, in sickness and health, in poverty and wealth, in prosperity and adversity.

Resignation is a Christian virtue. Desperation is an infidel vice.

ANOTHER CHANCE

The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the second time.—Jonah 3: 1.

One of the most impressive things about God's dealing with men is His insistent following up of His invitations. He does not become discouraged at hesitations or even flat refusals; He does not say: You've had your chance and that's all you'll get. He is always in need of prophets and workmen and He is continually concerned over the fate of each man.

The first chance is seldom enough for any of us. There are so many things working against our appreciation or acceptance of God's call. Fortunately for us, He is longsuffering and persistent. And the wisdom of that patience is frequently marked by the yielding of the rebellious and the conviction of the hesitant.

Moses hesitated a long time before he took up the call to lead the Exodus. Saul resisted stubbornly until the vision and voice on the Damascus road broke down his obstinacy.

The truth is that God's purpose for individuals and for the world is not judgment but salvation. And again and again it has happened that the second call has accomplished what the first has failed to do.

Would not you and I be far better servants of God if we learned from this method to be more generously persistent and resourceful in our dealings with one another?

AMUSEMENTS AND THEIR PURPOSE

My glory is fresh in me,
And my bow is renewed in my hand.
—Job 29:20.

The story is told of the Apostle John that one day a hunter found him seated on the ground and playing with a tame quail. The hunter expressed astonishment that so earnest and serious a man should be spending his time so idly. John looked up and asked: "Why is the bow on thy shoulder unstrung?"

"Because if kept always taut it would lose its spring," replied the hunter.

"For the same reason," said the Apostle, "I play with this little bird."

It is no sign of weakness, but a mark of decent regard for human nature to recognize the need of relaxation. Especially in the midst of a complex civilization where particular strain is put on the conscious effort to adapt oneself to environment it is important to unstring the bow.

But it is vital to remember that this unstringing is for the purpose of conserving the bow's strength. If your relaxation takes the spring out of your bow, it is worse than useless.

How much better it would be if we took our amusements less as a means of passing the time and more as a genuine (even if unconscious) restorative.

Perhaps then more of us would adopt the simple way of playing with some living creature instead of squandering money on expensive "amusements"—from which we must recover afterwards.

EDUCATION THROUGH AFFLICTION

For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.—Hebrews 2: 10.

The endeavour to avoid pain is a curious element in the futility of uninspired human nature. I do not mean that the conscious seeking after suffering is a noble purpose. The desire for martyrdom is often nothing more than the dull man's way of securing attention. But I mean that the principle on which many of us unconsciously conduct our lives is that of avoiding pain and cultivating pleasure. We forget that the ultimate factors in the spiritual universe are not pain and pleasure, but right and wrong; that deliberate following of the right not only often leads through suffering, but that this suffering has a real part to play in the education of the soul.

Not only is it true that the discoveries and inventions which mark the progress of man have been made at the cost of great suffering, but the heights of spiritual achievement have been invariably attained by those alone who know what anguish of soul is.

How terrible would be the loss to mankind if there were taken away from us the deeds accomplished through pain! And how poverty-stricken is human nature itself apart from the discipline of suffering.

Did the glory of Christ ever reach a higher point than when He was lifted up on the cross?

Can you and I ever be His true disciples unless we accept education through affliction?

ADVISING OTHER PEOPLE

The thing that thou doest is not good.—Exodus 18: 17.

Moses was lucky to have such a father-in-law as Jethro who counselled him so frankly and considerately. In fact this whole chapter of Exodus is a model of how to give advice to other people. Restrained, dignified, sympathetic—a true corrective and no mere pointing out of error.

The world needs more " in-laws " like that. And especially do we need to learn how to give advice to other people. Most of our criticism is so personal, so satisfactory to our own pride and so useless to help the person criticised.

Surely there must be some way to suppress that natural sin of tumultuous jubilation at the errors of others so that we can speak a helpful warning instead of an intolerable denunciation.

How sagely Jethro spoke! He referred to the great burden that Moses was wrongfully assuming, and he acutely pointed out that it would not only wear Moses away (which to enthusiastic Moses might seem unimportant), but would also wear out the people. He reached Moses through his beloved people. And then he pointed out that the great purpose of the Exodus was that " all the people shall go to their place in peace," and that to accomplish this, organization and the adjustment of responsibilities was needed.

The next time you have criticism to offer study Jethro's procedure.

Because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.—Luke 19: 17.

The proverb has it that "familiarity breeds contempt;" but that refers to the familiarity which has lost all sense of values. There is another kind of familiarity which produces love and respect.

In truth, novelty is no more desirable in itself than familiarity. And adventure in its essence depends less on strangeness of events than freshness of spirit. The number of experiences that in themselves can be called new for any man are very limited. But the number of times a man may be renewed in approaching the same experience seems to be without limit. Daily bread and sleep never lose their appeal.

How your heart leaps when you meet your friend! Will any mere stranger usurp his place? The more you see him, the better it is. Each time there is some new beauty or grace to discover.

Look at Nature. What is more commonplace than the burgeoning of life? But it will require a scientist and a poet to describe it. And they will remind you how much there is still to be discovered about the very grass at your doorstep, not to mention the stars shining nightly over your head.

Is your home a poor thing because it is familiar? Why, its very grace is in its familiarity. You can walk through it in the dark and put your hand on this and this and this. Can there be anything more familiar or more full of adventure than a home—the tenting place of immortal souls on the journey of life?

ADAPTABILITY

I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.—I Corinthians 9: 22.

One reason why some religious people have such difficulty in winning others to the religious life is because of their uncompromising rigidity. To them there is only one way of being religious—and that is their own particular way. They cannot see that a man may be religious and yet be quite different from themselves. They confuse unity of spirit with identity of form. Consequently, instead of persuading men, they antagonize them. They become proponents of party opinions, rather than missionaries of religion.

This was not the Apostle Paul's way. With an intelligence worthy of the great missionary cause, he adjusted his approach to various sorts of men in accordance with their ability to grasp his meaning. How different are his epistles to the Thessalonians, an assemblage of rough, simple folk, and that to the Colossians, a people that prided themselves on their philosophy and superior knowledge.

Was this adaptability the method of an opportunist, a compromiser? Examine Paul's writings, review the events of his life and see! Here was an unwavering spiritual allegiance combined with a careful observance of the surface differences in men in order that each man might be reached with the world-embracing message of Christ.

Is it not the genius of Christianity that it is the adaptable presentation of eternal truth?

THE FOLLY OF IMPATIENCE

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said, Up, make us gods, . . . for as for this Moses . . . we know not what is become of him.—Exodus 32: 1.

It is easy enough for us to see in the light of later events, the folly of this action. But at the time the surface evidence appeared to justify what the people did. The only virtue that would have saved them from their error was lacking: *i. e.,* patience. Having made up their minds how soon Moses ought to return, they refused to wait for him even though they had no remotest idea what might be keeping him. Impatient, impulsive, headstrong, they could not wait but plunged off into an ill-considered course that was full of trouble for them all.

Action taken under the impulse of haste and impatience is usually foolish. A superficial glance often seems to justify a course which a little patience reveals as the utterest folly. What reason had these people for doubting Moses, except their own impatience? What justification was there for their plan except their headlong desire to do something at once?

Impatience accounts for many wild schemes in days of emergency and creates many a frightful panic. Action is the result toward which thought tends, but impatient action is always the result of folly.

Can you hope to hit the mark if you go off at half-cock?

THE NATURE OF LOYALTY

Now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.—Acts 26:6.

The Apostle Paul was too intelligent and devout a man to view the world under the false simplicity of the "either this or that" formula. As a trained historian he saw that the manner of picturing life as a conflict of loyalties—a manner which is very popular today—indicates an extremely superficial view of history.

Above the conflict he found the progressive fulfilment of the old in the new. He had become a Christian and, in the popular view, this was a new loyalty in conflict with his old loyalty. But he pointed out that he stood in his new position "for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers." He had not cut himself off from the noble history of Israel. He had rather stepped into the right relationship with that history for his day and generation.

It is said that Henry Ward Beecher was once asked whether he were a Calvinist. "Yes," he replied, "because I believe what John Calvin would have believed had he lived in my time and seen things as I see them."

Loyalty never means the blind self-surrender of one man to another. It is a high spiritual relationship which calls for the fullest and freest exercise of personality.

THE QUESTION OF SERVICE

He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.—Luke 22:26.

These are the days in which many young men and women are graduating from the schools and colleges of our land. The contrast between the academic cloister and "the world" is not so great as it is supposed by some to be. Especially is this true for that fine and growing body of young people who at least in part earn the expenses of their education. Still there is no doubt that graduation marks an epoch in the life of the individual student. The question of what to do next, if it is not already decided, becomes the most practical issue in the world.

You will see some foolish young people drifting purposelessly into a career that will never satisfy them, or grasping greedily at something that looks good because of its financial returns.

You will hear silly old people grumbling because Johnny or Susie show no interest in a nice little job that is benevolently offered them in the hope that they will settle down and get married.

But you will also see the sensible people—both the young ones and their older counsellors—facing together the real question: Where can this young man or that young woman perform the highest service in the living of their lives?

Talk as you will about opportunities and salaries and careers and fame,—that is the main issue. Leave it out in favour of any other consideration and you are heading for trouble.

Bring it up and discuss it frankly. For of what value is life apart from the service it may render?

LIVING UP TO CAPACITY

I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.—John 10: 10.

Most of us talk a good deal about being too busy, but the truth is that very few of us are busy enough.

We are too anxious, or too confused, or too much in a hurry—but rarely too busy.

We have not learned how to live up to our capacities—either by way of work, or by way of enjoyment of life.

We spend a great deal of time running away from life, trying to get a snug little place fixed up for ourselves where we expect to sit down and enjoy life. But when we accomplish our purpose happiness has somehow eluded us.

Neither our physical nor moral muscles get sufficient exercise. We look for happiness in escape from life when in reality happiness is only to be found in meeting the full tides of life. Our real need is not less life but more life.

Surely that is the lesson which Jesus teaches us: "I came that they may have life and may have it abundantly."

What satisfaction is there for the sword that rusts away?

What peace is there for the candle that remains unlighted?

Let the sword be raised in the good battle of life.

Let the candle burn bravely to the socket.

"How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy."

THE TREATMENT OF INSIDERS

Be at peace among yourselves.—I Thessalonians 5: 13.

It would seem that among people who are agreed on the great purposes of life or who are bound together by some large common interest, peace could be taken for granted. And yet we all know that small things break the peace among brethren just as well as among strangers. In fact it often appears that it takes less to start a quarrel in the former than in the latter case.

The truth is that there is no situation in which the peace does not need to be kept.

One reason why we find so little peace is because we act as if it were a natural condition requiring no effort on our part, whereas in reality the maintenance of peace requires our constant and deliberate attention.

Did you ever notice how insignificant a cause will begin a quarrel among children in the same family? Or how easily those who are closely associated tend to drift apart even to the extent of becoming violently hostile, unless something is done to prevent it?

You cannot take peace for granted even among those who have every good reason for being at peace with each other. There is no logic in war or hostility of any kind.

If you really want peace to continue among families or churches or in any sort of relationship among men you will be well advised to take time and effort to maintain it. For peace is much more costly to restore than to keep. Among brethren it requires special attention.

THE TREATMENT OF OUTSIDERS

. . . *That ye may walk becomingly toward them that are without.*—I Thessalonians 4: 12.

It is necessary for men to associate themselves in congenial groups. And of course every such grouping involves incidentally the exclusion of certain other men. Trouble originates not with the natural instinct that draws together like-minded persons, but with the attitude inside the association toward those who are outside it. So long as the emphasis falls on the positive attraction that forms the association all is well. But when those inside begin to take a superior attitude toward those outside,—or vice versa—then disaster is imminent.

All this is especially true of religious associations where traditions or prejudices frequently transform convictions into intolerance.

As a strict matter of fact there is nothing that more promptly or accurately reveals the true nature of a man's faith than his attitude toward those who do not share it.

Is he patronizingly superior; or fiercely hostile; or stupidly indifferent? Be sure then that his own faith lacks depth, or balance, or conviction.

But does he respect the convictions of other men while holding fast his own; does he combat what he believes to be false opinions, not with personal animosity, but with the clear and positive statements of his own belief; does he seek always to learn what any man may have to teach him?

Then you may know that you have met a man of genuine faith because he walks becomingly toward them that are without.

PREPARING FOR WARS

Herein thou hast done foolishly; for from henceforth thou shalt have wars.—II Chronicles 16:9.

Perhaps the greatest issue before men today is that of putting an end to war. We have become deeply impressed with the futility of fighting as a means of settling any question.

"Nothing is ever settled until it is settled right." A nation may, by force of arms, temporarily obtain its ends over its neighbour; but that neighbour, if there is a real conviction of injustice, will never accept defeat permanently. The effect of righteousness alone, as Isaiah said, is quietness and confidence forever. The attempt to assemble power for any ends apart from justice, merely paves the way for coming disaster.

This was the error of Asa, King of Judah, when he made his alliance with Ben-hadad, King of Syria, and failed to rely on God. Hanani, the seer, warned him of the inevitable outcome of the barren combination of power.

The lesson has never been learned by the nations of the world. Still we go on preparing the way for future wars by our opportunist policy of ruthlessly grasping temporary advantages for ourselves, or trying to settle issues with other nations by the threat of superior force.

That nation alone is secure from the real perils of war whose man-power is made invincible by a home and foreign policy of justice and fair play for all.

A BUSYBODY

Let none of you suffer as a meddler in other men's matters.—I Peter 4: 15.

St. Peter seems to have disliked the busybody quite as cordially as St. Paul did. But he uses a different Greek word to describe this obnoxious person. St. Paul's word means a man or a woman who is always bustling around about trifles. St. Peter's word is stronger: it means a person who sets up to be a bishop over other people's affairs. The significance is the same in both cases.

The busybody is a he or a she who attempts to control or regulate the private concerns of others. He (for politeness' sake let us say he) concentrates his attention on the conduct of his neighbours, tells them what they should eat and drink and wear, instructs them how to carry on their business and train their children, and generally oversees their life for them. If they fail to follow his unsolicited advice, he promptly judges and condemns them, and usually circulates evil reports about them. He claims that it is a matter of conscience with him. Not at all,—it is a matter of vanity, malice, and mental erysipelas.

Naturally, he often gets himself into trouble. That is why St. Peter warned the Christians, "Let none of you suffer as a busybody."

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

His sons did bring a curse upon themselves, and he restrained them not.—I Samuel 3 : 13.

Despite the tendency of our day to be unduly concerned about other people's conduct of their affairs, it is necessary that we realize the impossibility of being totally irresponsible toward other people. We cannot by any chance wash our hands of concern for others without permanently crippling our own spiritual nature.

"No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

As a matter of legal obligation of course you are not required to be concerned about the personal welfare of your fellow-townsman, but if you are a good citizen you will be so.

Now, one of the most displeasing and disastrous kinds of irresponsibility appears (as it did in the case of Eli and his sons) in a certain type of family life.

Some parents think their responsibility ends when they clothe and feed their children and hand them over to church and school for education.

I once had the appalling experience of being roundly scolded by a lady of that sort for the bad actions of her boy to whom she both showed maternal neglect and offered a corrupt example of private conduct.

You cannot afford to make even the mistake of neglect. If social or business affairs interfere you'd better readapt them now than regret them later.

No institution will ever be devised to take the place of private concern for others—especially parental concern.

RESPECTABILITY OR SALVATION

I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.—Luke 5: 32.

Jesus quickly won the nickname of "the friend of publicans and sinners." It was a maliciously given title, for it was intended to insinuate that His purpose in associating with people of bad reputation was evil. But no one dared bring the charge directly. It would have fallen flat. So an endeavour was made to injure by innuendo where no charges could be brought.

Nowadays we acknowledge freely the glory of that nickname given in derision. Like many another name hostilely applied, it has been transformed into an honourable title.

But do we follow the example Jesus set in acquiring the name?

Perhaps the most serious single charge that can be brought against the Church as an institution is that it is induced to put respectability ahead of passionate concern for all sorts and conditions of men. When every allowance is made for our natural limitations of adaptability, does it not still remain true that at least in action our churches are more concerned with respectability than salvation? We are a little more eager to be above all suspicion rather than to follow our Master in this as in other respects.

Is this not the reason why many men who are earnest Christians tend to avoid the Church?

If church officers and members occupied themselves more with the cure of souls and less with external conformity and orderliness of conduct, we would at least stand nearer our Master than we do. Is that not the heart of every reform needed in the Christian Church?

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

Honour all men.—I Peter 2:17.

One of the great difficulties in human relationships comes from our failure to render honour to all men. We are too easily inclined to coddle ourselves and our particular group of intimates and to neglect or despise all outside of that circle.

Well, of course that is a little better than being a selfish individualist,—not to mention the fact that it is also a somewhat wiser worldly philosophy,—but it is still contrary to the teaching of universal religion.

For the fact is that, while the personal aspects of love must necessarily be reserved for the limited circle of those who are our particular friends, the respect for human personality, which is the basis of intelligent love, cannot rightfully be denied to any man.

We greatly need, today, a renewed emphasis on this truth. Our neglect of it accounts for man's oppression of man at long range without any particular feeling of concern; and explains our cruelly conventional and impersonal relations with those who are called servants—whether "domestic" or "public."

In the final analysis, the significance of men does not depend on their degree of personal relationship to me (or anybody else), but on the fact that as living souls we are all created in the image of God and owe each other mutual respect.

GOOD-HUMOURED RESOURCEFULNESS

So he reasoned in the synagogue . . . and in the market-place every day with them that met him.—Acts 17: 17.

Paul was evidently not only a man of great vigour and force but likewise a man of persuasive power and resourcefulness. The word " reasoned " is frequently used in the book of Acts concerning his preaching. His efforts to draw men to the Gospel were not founded on his ability to enforce his opinion on others, but rather on his success in confronting men with their own consciences. He cannot be accused of trying to bluster and smash his way through men's minds.

I was playing pool one evening on a rickety old table in a London mission. Failing entirely to negotiate the bumps I fell to hitting the balls rather viciously. Whereupon an old weatherbeaten fellow who was watching whispered hoarsely to his neighbour: " Wot the gen'leman lacks in skill 'e more than makes hup for in force."

There was no indiscriminate use of force in Paul's methods. His speech always made men feel the skilfully aroused pressure of their own consciences.

Nor did he complain if everybody did not come to hear him preach. He simply carried the same preaching into the market-place.

Doubtless he often wished the mountain would come to him, but if it would not he would go to the mountain. That may be Mahomet's phrase but it was Paul's method long beforehand.

Good-humoured resourcefulness is a great aid in getting things done.

PASSING RESOLUTIONS

All the assembly said, Amen, and praised Jehovah. And the people did according to this promise.
—Nehemiah 5:13.

When Nehemiah found that his work of restoring Jerusalem was being handicapped by the greediness of certain astute but unprincipled inhabitants of the city, he proposed the abolition of usury in order to put an end to an intolerable situation. The people voted in favour of his proposition. And not only so, but they also put it into practice. They passed a resolution and actually put it into action!

Something tells me that there is in this fact an important theme for our meditation today.

The passing of resolutions is a very popular form of exercise. Lots of people seem to feel that when a resolution is passed responsibility for it is ended.

As a matter of fact when a resolution is voted and printed for circulation, nothing has been accomplished unless action is undertaken for putting it into practice.

Would it not be better if we adopted fewer of these resounding resolutions addressed to nobody in particular (and least of all to ourselves) and laid hold of a few simple principles and embodied them in our lives?

Wouldn't our Christianity be a far more honest thing if we adopted this procedure?

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.—Lamentations 3:27.

Irresponsibility dressed up to look like independence is one of the accepted delusions of the romanticists. As a matter of fact everybody knows that, except for very little children, a measure of responsibility is a vital need of all people. Of course we all like to talk about being utterly carefree; but that is only a brief holiday mood which comes as a reaction from the steady strain of responsibility. If irresponsibility lasted any length of time we should soon sicken of it. For we know perfectly well that what we need most is not easier lives but greater strength.

Naturally no one wants to see little children prematurely aged by the weight of responsibility thrown on young and undeveloped shoulders. The pinched faces of toiling children who ought to be studying and playing, or the weary backs of "little mothers" who ought to be playing with dolls instead of caring for babies are disgraces to our civilization. But it is no greater disgrace than that of the young men and women who grow up without a care and develop into parasites on society, a shame to themselves and an intolerable nuisance to their families and friends.

In every town and village you may find their hangout, whether it be a street corner, a dance hall or a private house.

The discipline of responsibility is a vital part of education for life. Unduly to postpone its acceptance by yourself or others is a social injustice all the more pernicious because of its sentimentality.

RESERVE POWER

David . . . chose him five smooth stones out of the brook.—I Samuel 17:40.

In the fascinating story of David's victory over Goliath everyone remembers that David chose five smooth stones out of the brook, but that the very first one he hurled from his sling hit the mark and gave him the victory. David was apparently a dead shot, but he carried the four extra stones in case of an emergency. Being a wise, though youthful warrior, he knew the uncertainties of battle and came supplied with extra ammunition. Doubtless he was confident of his mastery of the sling and the righteousness of his cause, but he was not going to boast about mastery even to himself, nor rely on the justice of his cause to excuse ample preparation on his part.

Some people are rather inclined to skimp their own preparations, especially in a good cause or for a feat in which they are particularly skilled.

For example, there are ministers who keep talking about one idea only in the unsearchable riches of Christ and will not increase their equipment nor broaden their preparation. They are not very effective because if their one shot misses they are helpless.

Also there are many people who are trying to meet life with an irreducible minimum of religion. They are taking more than a long chance, for religion is powerless until it represents the fullest generosity.

THE FOLLY OF RESENTMENT

A revolting and a rebellious heart.—Jeremiah 5 : 23.

Some children were playing in the Park. A small boy came flying down a sloping asphalt walk on his scooter, the very embodiment of joy. At the foot of the hill he lost control and swerved into the curb, pitching headlong on the grass at the side. He arose unhurt but with the terrible marks of anger on his face, went back to the curb and deliberately kicked it with all his might. Of course, then he hurt himself and howled with pain and resentment.

All of which is characteristic of many people far older than the little boy. They resent injuries—especially injuries to their self-esteem—even when they are due to their own blunders and are inflicted by the impersonal laws of nature.

The same thing applies to the harbouring of personal grudges. The amount of energy and mental power wasted on resentment of one sort or another would suffice for the carrying out of many noble projects.

The damage done us by malicious persons or by collision with the laws of God's universe is nothing compared with the injury we work ourselves through resentment.

As a beloved friend wrote me the other day: " People are always looking out of the back of their heads at the past with a sullen mental attitude which doesn't help them at all, instead of looking forward to the future with some measure of hope."

SENSELESS REMORSE

Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.—Jonah 1 : 12.

That offer of Jonah to be sacrificed for the good of the ship has a fine sound of generosity about it. But unless the offer is to be interpreted entirely apart from Jonah's character, as illustrated elsewhere in the book, its root lay in acute remorse and childish superstition.

Being caught in the storm as he was running away from the call of God, his baffled and sore conscience dragged him down into senseless despair. Instead of perceiving that God was seeking to turn him from his selfish way, he found only God's retribution following him. His offer to be thrown overboard came not so much out of willingness to be sacrificed for the sake of his shipmates as out of sudden personal despair. If he could not have his own way of going to Tarshish, what was his life worth? If God would not leave him alone, he would rather be dead. Very likely there was a touch of pity for his fellow voyagers in the final offer, but the root of it was barren remorse.

Remorse, until the rudder of the will is turned toward duty and the star of hope arises, is without meaning.

To be so sorry and afraid that you wish you were dead, is not enough. What God asks for is repentance unto salvation.

UTILITARIAN RELIGION

O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.—Matthew 15:28.

Suppose a man who had never been aware of the beauty of the world suddenly had his eyes opened and saw the exquisite glory of a landscape. Suppose then he became obsessed with the irresistible desire to reproduce it on canvas and went to a great artist and said: "Quick, give me the skill to paint this scene." Would we not call him a great fool, for thinking that it would be possible at a moment's notice to gain and exercise so marvellous a power?

And yet, is that not just the attitude many people take in religion? So long as men feel at ease in themselves, they turn away from religion. But when some great trouble besets them or an unsurmountable obstacle stands in their way, they would like to receive faith at once in order to remove the trouble or the obstacle.

No wonder that the religion men seek to work up in order to produce this or that particular result is impotent. It must be so, because there is no faith in it.

Religion is not a utilitarian scheme for obtaining omnipotence when we in ourselves are helpless. It is a way of life which, being daily practised, provides saving power in the time of crisis.

If you have faith first you will have power in time of need; but you cannot get power by calling for faith when you are in trouble.

PROOF BY REITERATION

They think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.—Matthew 6: 7.

There is a curious idea abroad today that if you keep on saying a thing often enough people will accept it for the truth.

Doubtless it is a fact that many people judge more of the importance of any statement by the number of times they see it in print or hear it said, than by the person who says or writes it or by its innate value.

I have just received the seventeenth letter in six months from a firm informing me that a certain machine which they make is absolutely essential to my business. Unfortunately for the firm I happen to know more about my own affairs than they do. The first letter I read. All the others have gone into the waste-paper basket. If that method of advertising is good business, then there is something radically wrong with our system of education. Two or three circulars, to be sure one at least receives attention, I can understand. But seventeen is only an evidence of poor business or a frightful commentary on human nature as at present educated.

What a revolution it would work in our modern life if we could really train people to disregard the vociferousness of statements and to observe the speaker, his reasons, and to weigh the statements themselves.

RACIAL LABELS

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.—John 4: 20.

The Samaritan woman, perceiving that Jesus was of the Jewish race, attributed to him the standard Jewish belief that men ought to worship in Jerusalem. It was an utterly superficial judgment. Jesus was a Jew, but not in the sense that he shared all opinions with his compatriots.

Naturally as a Jew, and until the authorities of his own people cast him out, his worship centered in Jerusalem. But it was not a narrow nationalistic worship that he observed in the national shrine. He told that worldly woman, "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." Neither the Holy Mountain of Samaria nor the Holy City of Jerusalem was the exclusive place of worship. For God's call is for the spiritual worship of the heart which is subject to no form, time or place.

The Samaritan woman made a serious mistake in attributing an opinion to Jesus on the basis of her observation of certain racial characteristics.

Even so, to apply a racial label to any man without considering whether or not he deserves it is a great injustice. And this is true both by way of commendation or blame.

For each individual is not only a representative of his race or nation. He may be, first of all, a man.

THE PURPOSE OF THE HEART

But one thing is needful.—Luke 10: 42.

The story of Martha cumbered about much serving and complaining to Jesus because her sister, who was seated at Jesus' feet, was not helping her, is frequently misunderstood. Jesus' rebuke to Martha and commendation of Mary has been taken to mean the absolute superiority of the reflective over the active manner of life. Poor Martha has been condemned by well-fed people for being busy over such unimportant things as food, and justification has been found for idleness in the undiscriminating praise of Mary.

We need to go deeper to find the real lesson. What Jesus rebuked in Martha was not the task she had undertaken, but the grumbling and worried spirit in which she was doing it. What he praised in Mary was not her aloofness from the supper preparations but her concern in the things of the spirit.

Suppose Martha had gone about her work cheerfully, singing as we have all heard women sing over the supper dishes; and suppose Mary had been uttering to Jesus unkind comments on her "worldly sister." Which, then, do you think, would have received the rebuke and which the praise?

There is no one exclusive form of service that is acceptable to God. But there is one spiritual attitude which must pervade everything that God's people do.

RELIGION AND TALK

Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?—Luke 6:46.

One reason why some people are pessimistic about the outlook for religion is because they confuse religion with talking about religion. The latter is a very beneficial and somewhat neglected exercise but ought never to be considered the sole evidence of the possession of true religion.

For religion is the right attitude of any whole life toward God and man; while the ability to talk helpfully on religious themes is a particular gift.

Bearing witness to the truth is far more than talking about it. I can never forget the lesson taught me by one of the sanest and most helpful Church officers I have ever known. A common and lovely phrase in his public prayers goes like this: "Help us, O Lord, to hear the truth, and then to live it out that it may become in us the living Word."

The severest criticism that can be levelled against the Church is that it fosters talk about religion and religious ceremonies, but neglects embodied justice, mercy and truth. The reason for this is evident: It is because men are always confusing the form with the reality, the manner of expression with the thing itself.

Talk is valuable; but even religious talk is only a small part of religion.

WITHOUT PUBLICITY

See thou say nothing to any man.—Mark 1:44.

I have a friend who declares that publicity is not always an unmixed blessing even for good deeds or ideas. There are times he claims when things need to grow silently and unnoticed out of sight. The burgeoning of summer is lovely to his thought, but he is also charmed by the silent underground contribution of winter. He mourns the crippling of many fine movements through too much forcing under the pitiless rays of public popularity. The Christian Church suffered greatly in his opinion when Christianity became the State religion under the Emperor Constantine. Today the Church is handicapped by being too much in the public eye. Let her take the quiet ways of inner development lest she be swallowed up in cheap notoriety.

Can you advertise humility? What does self-conscious goodness become? Surely there is lovely music that cannot be played on the big drum or the trumpet.

There are even flowers that bloom only in the shadows of secret forests. You need not seek for the greatest values only in those things which are blared forth as new and unprecedented.

Jesus at least began his work in the ancient synagogue and under the Mosaic law. What part did undesired and unsought publicity play in the break that later came?

What do you think of my friend's opinion? Has it not a needed emphasis for our day—even if it be not the whole truth? Some things must speak for themselves without advertisement.

PROTUBERANT PROSPERITY

Their eyes stand out with fatness.—Psalm 73: 7.

To be prosperous may be a legitimate part of a man's purpose. But there is a kind of prosperity which is disquieting to all honest men.

Francis Bacon said, " Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New." And every thoughtful man knows that the way of life to which Jesus calls men does not set prosperity as one of its aims.

Not that a wealthy man should be looked on with suspicion. To take that attitude would be to neglect Jesus' teaching of the value of every human soul. But there is a kind of prosperity which is totally inconsistent with the Christian position. And it behooves every man who inherits or earns large sums of money to see to it that his prosperity is not of that kind.

The vulgar displays of some rich people betray not only their evil hearts, but provide a source of genuine temptation to other people.

No one can say how serious a trial it is for hard-working people to labour for a mere pittance where they are surrounded by the idle rich. No one can say how much bitterness is engendered out of a sense of genuine injustice.

It is all very well to condemn envy, but that is not the whole story. Protuberant prosperity is a source of real social danger because it reveals an evil heart.

WHERE ARE THE PROPHETS?

Ye know how to interpret the face of the earth and the heaven; but how is it that ye know not how to interpret this time?—Luke 12: 56.

There are lots of good weather-prophets in the world. Their business has a direct and practical bearing on the conduct of human affairs. Their observations are accurate and intelligent and their predictions are valuable.

But when it comes to interpreting this age, where are the prophets? Not that candidates for the position are lacking. There are more than enough of them as everybody knows. But they have not the qualifications in their field which the weather-prophets have in theirs.

Such was Jesus' criticism in his day. Would it be any different in our day?

Our age is well supplied with men who are very skilful in what are called practical affairs—the relating of nature's forces to man's daily life. Let no one depreciate the usefulness of such service.

But is there not a deeper aspect to life than this? Is there not need that men should learn how to observe and criticisė (in the full meaning of that word) this age?

No one can say what our age means or what men ought to do until a prophet arises who will observe widely and ponder deeply instead of glancing and chattering, and who will draw conclusions from established facts rather than from personal prejudices.

Alas for the age that shows consummate skill in almost everything except the interpretation of life!

RELIGION AND REASON

Ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you.

—I Peter 3:15.

A great deal of the difficulty about religion in a scientific age comes from misunderstandings engendered by extremists. On the one hand, some men desire to reduce religion to mere rationalism. On the other, men desire to debar reason. They would treat even questions of historic fact as issues of faith.

"There are two extremes," wrote Pascal, "to exclude reason and to admit only reason."

We must remember that mind is not the only thing in man and that pride of intellect is full of peril. Equally must we realize that Jesus' Great Commandment calls on us to love God with the mind as well as with the heart and soul.

Does not the word of our text give us the key to the right relationship between religion and reason? Religion is (in the partial definition of this aspect of it) a reasonable hope. It is not the undisciplined, fanciful longing of the troubled human soul. It is the tested and approved response of the soul to God.

The origin of religion is neither an intellectual argument nor a cherished delusion. It is the formulated expression of the interaction of intuition and experience. It is "faith which is but hope grown wise."

CAN PROPHECY BE CONTROLLED?

Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the King with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak thou good.—I Kings 22: 13.

Ahab, King of Israel, was a bad man, but like all bad men he had certain good qualities in him. It is well that we should remember that any evil which endures must have some good mingled with it.

Ahab was a pretty efficient organizer of the nation's defenses, but like many other able men he was unable to put up with criticism. What he wanted was conformity to his will. And he made the mistake of thinking that he was not only King of Israel, but also head of the prophets.

Well, of course he found prophets who were very ready to prophesy as he wished concerning his expedition with Jehoshaphat against Syria. There are always men who will freely bestow the sanctions of religion on the popular cause. They keep their feet on the earth—which is sensible—but they keep also an ear to the ground—which may be good politics but is certainly not prophecy.

Among the so-called prophets of Israel Micaiah alone opposed Ahab in this plan. Thus he incurred the enmity of the subservient prophets and was imprisoned by Ahab. But later events showed who was the prophet and who were the flatterers.

How foolish to try to control prophecy! The only value in prophecy lies in its direct message from God through the lips of a sane and fearless man.

TOLERANCE THROUGH SYMPATHY

For he loveth our nation, and himself built us our synagogue.—Luke 7: 5.

On the now desolate site of Capernaum, I have seen the rich ruins of that splendid synagogue which a noble Roman soldier built for his Jewish friends and neighbours. Would that I could see the man himself,—that peaceful warrior, that godly heathen, that generous lover whose affections overcame his prejudices, that humble seeker after truth, of whom Jesus said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Here in this chapter St. Luke gives us two pictures of that lovely virtue, tolerance through sympathy. First, the Centurion, who had not only a kind heart but also a big good deed for people of an alien race. Second, Christ, who asked no questions about creeds, but recognized in this man the vital power of that loving faith in God and man by which the world is overcome.

There are two kinds of tolerance.

The one comes from indifference. It is a supercilious thing. "No matter what you believe," it seems to say, "you will have to take the consequences. That does not affect me, because I have the right creed."

The other kind of tolerance comes through sympathy. "You and I do not profess the same doctrines," it says, "but we seek the same end,—the glory of God and the good of our fellow-men. Our points of view, our circumstances, our educations have been different. The road is not easy. Let us help one another."

MORAL-BLINDNESS

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness.
—Isaiah 5 : 20.

Just as we have the phenomenon of color-blindness, so do we have moral-blindness,—the failure of the individual to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong.

The doctrine of the Inner Light is true; but there are exceptions. That's why it is necessary to appeal not only to the individual's innate conscience, but also to an external standard.

Any one of us is liable to go seriously wrong if we rely solely on the light within us. " If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness."

The trouble that many of us bring on ourselves is that we deliberately or carelessly destroy the original sensitiveness of our consciences.

You cannot indefinitely go on smothering the voice of conscience and find it still protesting with the same vigour. You cannot continue calling evil good without destroying the sensitive discrimination necessary to moral judgments.

The man who follows that course will ultimately be calling the Cosmos a chaos because there is moral disorder in his heart.

For you cannot possibly see things as they are for yourself if the windows of your soul distort or discolor your view.

CALAMITY-HOWLERS ARE NOT PROPHETS

It displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.
—Jonah 4: 1.

Jonah was disgruntled because his prediction that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days was not fulfilled. He quite overlooked the fact that the repentance of the people had averted their imminent peril. In other words, he was more interested in his own reputation as a "prophet" than in the purpose for which God had sent him to predict the disaster of the wicked city, i. e., to fend off the destruction by bringing the people to turn from their evil ways.

There are, alas! plenty of modern "prophets" like Jonah. They are not true prophets speaking of the consequences of evil, with the purpose and hope of turning men unto salvation. They are mere foretellers of doom, satisfied only if their self-esteem is enhanced by the fulfilment of their predictions. The motive behind their activities is the petty hope that some day they will be able to say, "I told you so."

The only satisfaction that a true prophet finds in pointing out the destruction that must issue from evil conduct, is to add force to his idea for righteousness.

It will be a great day for the world when we learn to turn a deaf ear to the selfish calamity-howlers and remember the saving purpose of God.

TOO MUCH COMPANY

Jesus . . . withdrew again into the mountain himself alone.—John 6: 15.

Even the most social of souls must escape at times from human company. The continuous presence of other people—yes, even those rare souls who know how to obliterate themselves—is fatal to the growth of the Soul.

Jesus' love for men was deep and steadfast and invincible. Yet He frequently withdrew for solitary communion with God. Even when he wanted the support of Peter and James and John in the Garden of Gethsemane He wanted them to abide here and watch while He went forward a little to pray. There are things that the soul must face alone, though it be comforting to have friends near by.

One of the self-imposed handicaps of many people in this sociable age is that of too much company. We have not enough friends, who always know when even their beloved presence is an intrusion on the soul. And we have too many acquaintances with whom we pass the time but advance no further upon the mysterious journey of our life.

To be continuously with company breeds a shallow and thoughtless wit. It issues in the most terrible of all loneliness, soul-loneliness. It stunts the soul which, to grow, must stand at times alone with God.

TOO MUCH SPECIALIZATION

Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint.
—Proverbs 29: 18.

The inclination of people to go to extremes is the direct result of lack of vision. To " see life steadily and see it whole " is the first requirement of sane and balanced action.

But it is not a characteristic of many people today. We are much inclined to run everything into the ground. Even good things are carried so far that they often become evil. We forget how readily any virtue may turn into a vice when it is stressed to the exclusion of all other virtues.

Make no mistake about it. I do not advocate the promulgation of a neat little policy of moderation. The wishy-washy fellow who is " neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring " is a poor ideal for any age. But I leave it to the judgment of careful observers of our day whether most of us are not weakened in one way or another because we are extremists.

No doubt our age is rightly an age of specialization. We must divide our work according to our qualifications in order to share the benefits of civilization. But we must see to it that in being specialists we exercise care lest we become something less than men. While we labour in our special departments of the world's work let us not fail to live in the fulness of life which God has given to us.

TOO MUCH ORGANIZATION

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Jehovah!—Isaiah 31 : 1.

There is a feeling abroad today that the main need of our age is improved organization. In government, in business, in social life, in the Church, organization occupies a great deal of time.

It goes without saying that organization is needed. But are we not inclined to look a little too exclusively at the technique of our various social procedures and neglect the dynamic without which even the best schemes must fail?

Of what use is a plan for co-operation unless we have men of good-will to work in it?

Where will a business organization get you without honest and faithful workers to fill the positions?

How can government proceed unless the men who administer the offices are honourable as well as capable?

Can the Church make disciples of all nations by setting up a programme and apportioning various duties to her members if they lack the dynamic of personal conviction?

Of course the real object behind organization is to increase the freedom, power and happiness of individuals. But it cannot accomplish this if we attend so closely to the plans that we forget the nature of the individual and the source of his real greatness.

Organization is important. But is not even the best organization impotent unless it is permeated by the Spirit of God who alone gives strength and grace to men?

FIRST-HAND RELIGION

Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.—John 4: 42.

That worldly creature, the Samaritan woman, with whom Jesus spoke at the well, did a fine thing when she brought her fellow townsmen to see and hear Jesus for themselves. In a way it was a most natural thing to do. And perhaps for that very reason it was fine. It was the sort of thing a child would do. "Come and see," she cried and her enthusiasm was contagious and they went.

As a result they became believers—not at second-hand, on her say-so, but at first-hand, from their own experience.

That is the method of spiritual religion. It consists not in telling people about Christ and then stopping there, but in telling about him so that men and women shall go to him for themselves and know and believe at first-hand.

After all belief in the final sense is a personal word. And so also must be the authority on which it is founded. There is little use in anybody else telling me what I must believe. I must be taken to the source from which the belief springs. Because until my belief becomes personal it is nothing but an expression of external conformity. It cannot affect my soul until the witness of other people is corroborated in my own experience.

The final verification of Christianity rests in the fact that Christ is a living and present Saviour whom we may know and love and follow today.

WEEDS THAT STRANGLE

And the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word.—Matthew 13:22.

What Jesus says about the good seed of the gospel, in the Parable of the Sower, is true of many other good things,—ideals, resolutions, plans, convictions of duty, purposes of improvement.

Life and human nature are full of weeds which are ready to overgrow and strangle down the plants of worth and value.

You cannot reforest a barren region with noble trees, unless you protect them in their youth against the encroachments of the scrub and the underbrush.

I have seen many a fine rose-bush choked to death by bind-weed.

I knew a boy whose education was stifled because his father gave him two automobiles and a motor-boat.

I knew a man who could never accomplish anything seriously worth while because he was always tinkering with trifles. I knew another man whose house was so full of rare and costly bric-a-brac that he was a slave to the care of his collections.

Unless we know the difference between flowers and weeds we are not fit to take care of a garden.

It is not enough to have truth planted in our minds. We must learn and labour to keep the ground clear of thorns and briars, follies and perversities, which have a wicked propensity to choke the word of life.

So these nations feared Jehovah, and served their graven images; their children likewise, and their children's children.—II Kings 17:41.

The Assyrian conquest of Israel and the importation of immigrants from many nationalities into Samaria was part of a deliberate policy to disintegrate the Northern Kingdom. How well it succeeded appears in the contradictory statement that the inhabitants both feared Jehovah and served their graven images, and that these customs became hereditary.

Of course this meant that their religion was no longer a vital affair. It was imitative. Observing the customs followed by people of other religions, they absorbed a little from this and that into their own practice.

But wasn't that a permissible thing to do? Hasn't this been the history of all religions in the world?

Religions that spread show themselves adaptable to new conditions and capable of development and modification. That indeed is a law of life.

But, by the same token, when men try to include in their religion elements that deny its very validity, or when the customs of people around them have more influence on them than their own convictions, then is their religion moribund.

Surely in the depths of all honourable spiritual belief there is a meeting-ground for all men of good-will. But what can justify the religionist with his carefully-glued-together faith composed of selected observances from many religions in none of which he believes?

Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood.
—Ephesians 6: 12.

I have been reading an account of an attendance contest recently held between two Bible classes. In one the attendance rose during the four Sundays of the contest from 260 to 681, and in the other from 343 to 552.

One class, says the magazine account, " resorted to the personal invitation and door-bell plan " while the other " brought to their aid street parades, transparencies, brass bands, etc. The work of both these classes is noteworthy."

Noteworthy of what?

Religion cannot permanently flourish as a form of competition. It must be an enlistment of life. What I want to know is: What are those classes doing now, several months after the competition?

Possibly good came out of this strenuous effort. I do not know. Publicity only records the contest. But was there not inevitable damage done? Do you not lower your cause by the employment of methods contrary to the spirit of what you seek to accomplish?

Can you picture Jesus running a competition with the Scribes and Pharisees? His disciples dwindled as he walked the way of the cross. But did that reveal failure, —or success?

THE RIGHT USE OF MONEY

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.
—I Timothy 6: 10.

Few men fail to observe the advantages of money in this world, but few have grace to make a proper use of its power.

It should be carefully noted that the abuse of money is not by any means the exclusive fault of those who have large sums of it. In fact the man who goes out to raise money for some benevolent plan is usually surprised at the persistence of men of wealth in evaluating the precise nature of the service which their gifts may render. After all, there is no more justification for a man of large means to be careless of his money than for his poorer brother.

The real root of the evil that so often gathers about money is not to be found in money itself, or in the amount of the money. It is to be found in the nature of the men who deal with it. The love of money—not money itself—is a root of all kinds of evil.

Over a doorway in an old Dutch banking house is this inscription in French:

" The Golden Age is the age in which gold does not rule."

The value of money lies in its control by spiritual purpose. To desire it for its own sake is to destroy all human values.

A RESTFUL YOKE

Take my yoke upon you . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls.—Matthew 11:29.

As in most vital truth there is an element of paradox in this invitation and promise of Jesus to his disciples.

Where most of us make our mistake is in associating rest with comfort, ease, irresponsibility. We forget that not only does the hand, the mind and the foot need rest but also the soul needs rest. And especially we fail to perceive that there is no rest for the body until the soul be at rest.

And the one place where the soul can rest is in the yoke of Christ.

Truly does the psalmist say: "There is no rest for the wicked." How can there be with his soul restless and unhappy within him?

But let a man accept cheerfully the responsibilities of discipleship, let him walk under the easy yoke of Christ, and what a miracle is wrought! Shall he find weariness of body and mind? Certainly. Shall he perhaps suffer? Very likely. But shall he find rest unto his soul? The answer is unanimous. It is far better from every point of view to endure anything rather than to suffer the intolerable anguish of a restless soul.

If our age is an unhappy age it is just because we are neglecting the soul's rest and because we need to learn that no peace can be found apart from the soul's demand for the restful yoke of Christ.

AN EVIDENCE OF RELIGION

What do ye more than others?—Matthew 5:47.

The great characteristic of spiritual religion is that its first concern is a transformed humanity, men reborn, remade as God would have us to be. Its object is not to make men, as we are in our own wisdom, more comfortable or more powerful in the world. The goal is not the remolding of this sorry scheme of things more nearly to our hearts' desire, as a certain pessimistic philosopher once sighed. It is rather to transform all men, beginning with ourselves, into the likeness of God's man, Jesus Christ.

Naturally this purpose involves conflict with every custom, habit, institution of men that stands in its way. And the method of procedure is the most radical method in the world, i. e., the winning of individuals and the using of them singly and in organized groups, for bringing all men under the influence of God's transforming grace.

Worldly-minded men whose material profits or plans are affected combat spiritual religion often with great astuteness. Their most successful opposition today seems to lie in blurring religious convictions and toning down the sharp definitions of religious conduct.

If you and I count ourselves religious men, are we distinguishable from worldly men in our home life, our business affairs, our amusements? Or are we nominal and therefore traitorous disciples of Jesus Christ?

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCY

A righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; But the wicked are overthrown by calamity.

—Proverbs 24: 16.

Trouble and disaster in this world are not reserved for those whose purpose is evil. Misfortune besets the righteous as well as the wicked. A church will burn as easily as the stronghold of a robber. A missionary of the cross is as vulnerable to bullets as a bandit.

But there is considerable difference in the effect of disaster on righteous and wicked men. Nor is the reason for this far to seek.

The confidence of the wicked man depends on his own strength and on the uncertain element of evil in other men. He must always be haunted with insecurity and doubt. Any genuine calamity breaks his heart.

The confidence of the righteous man is in God. He himself is but God's servant believing that God's will must prevail. Therefore he rises from every fall and takes up his task again.

There is no more inspiring observation to be made on men than just this contrast between the resiliency of those who suffer disaster in the service of God and the deadness of those who fall in the promotion of evil. It is one of the clear indications of the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS

Peter . . . saith, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, . . . what is that to thee? Follow thou me.—John 21:21-22.

Most of us are fearless critics of other men's conduct and meticulous denouncers of other men's sins. To mind other people's business is a common pastime of our day. There are very few of us who are not deeply concerned over the reform of—somebody else.

Now there is no more lovely experience than to feel the personal interest of a friend in you and your affairs. But there is no more irritating experience than to be aware of unfriendly meddling and prying into your private affairs. And it must be frankly said that the spirit of much reform today is of the latter type. The sense of self-satisfaction that it gives the reformer far outweighs the aid it brings the object of reform. Its method of effecting contact with human nature is crude and bungling. Again and again it defeats its own ends (estimable as they often are) by its crass stupidity.

A girl of the younger generation said to me in an aggrieved tone concerning a zealous young reformer who had seized the first opportunity of personal acquaintanceship to offer advice: "I wouldn't have minded if he had first taken the trouble to become a friend of mine, and then criticised me."

After all, the man who cannot respect personality is hardly qualified to be listened to on any subject. We must make room for the most Christian doctrine of minding our own business.

COSTLINESS OF RELIGION

Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.—Jeremiah 29: 13.

As surely as religion is the most valuable thing in the world it is the most costly. It asks of a man all that he has and is—no less. Complete self-consecration is the one and inescapable condition.

The price always remains the same.

One of the reasons why we find ourselves with such shocking substitutes is because we are looking for a bargain at a lesser price.

We would like the comforts of religion but we want to withhold the cost of complete consecration.

We would like to perform occasional service but not have it interfere with our accustomed manner of life.

Always there is some little reservation that we want to make and consequently we find ourselves in possession not of genuine religion but of some substitute which invariably fails us at the critical moment.

But if a man pay the full price of giving all that he has and is to God the miracle occurs, for he receives back not only his own life, but his own life transformed and empowered by God. Religion is now the most real thing in the world to him, for he finds it in his own life.

And who can say that any price is too great to pay for that blessed experience?

PICTURES IN THE MIND

Son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in his chambers of imagery? For they say, Jehovah seeth us not.

—Ezekiel 8: 12.

It is a strange power, this ability to bring before the eyes of the mind pictures which only you yourself may see. It is full of deadly peril and of great good—according to the choice of pictures.

At first it is only a matter which concerns yourself but sooner or later the whole affair will come to the light and be seen of men. From God it is never hidden.

When a man of unblemished reputation and exemplary conduct is suddenly discovered, to the horror of his associates, involved in some disgraceful act, the chances are great that his chambers of imagery are hung with preliminary sketches of the deed.

But when a man stands patient and unmovable amid dreadful temptations and hardships, be sure that his secret mind is hung with scenes of peace and hope and courage.

For that inner and supposedly secret chamber is the source of the outward and revealing act.

How important then it is that the imaginings of the heart be concerned with good and not with evil!

Perhaps, then, one of the most practical things a man can do with his holidays and leisure time is to store his mind with pictures of beauty and truth. By discriminating thought, conversation, observation, he may lay up hidden sources of strength and grace.

SAVING POWER OF MEMORY

I remembered the word of the Lord.—Acts 11:16.

Peter found himself in an unexpected and strange situation. Brought up in the belief that God was exclusively concerned with people of his own race, he was suddenly confronted with the clear evidence of God's interest in the Gentiles. Of course Peter was all at sea in his mind. Then memory came to his rescue. He recalled the word of Jesus about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and recognized that he was faced with the dilemma of accepting or rejecting God himself. Of course, being an honest man, Peter accepted God and rejected the racial tradition in which he had been born.

But do you think Peter could have done this if he had not remembered the word of the Lord? Jesus had prepared the way for Peter's decision. It was the memory of his word that saved Peter from utter confusion in that perilous moment.

So it is with many of us in our crises. The memory of the word of some wise and gracious teacher comes to our rescue, and the new and bewildering experience in which we stand assumes a familiar and orderly aspect. We are set free from fear and panic and enabled to act with sanity and wisdom. Especially is this true for those whose memory is full of the words of Christ.

CHATTY RELIGION

The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom.
—Psalm 111: 10.

I cannot rid myself of a feeling of anxiety about a tendency in our Churches today to make religion an easy and familiar thing in a rather vulgar sense. The tone of many sermons one hears and reads about is not conversational, direct and simple—all of which things are highly desirable if religion is to really affect the people—but it is chatty. There is a slipshod, easy-going atmosphere to many Church services and meetings that ill-becomes the mighty purpose of the Church. There is a jocose smartness about talk on themes of eternal significance that destroys the reverential spirit in which alone religion is possible.

Perhaps the fault (with notable exceptions) is most apparent in Church advertising and publicity. The endeavor to catch the eye in newspapers and on bulletin boards frequently leads to statements that are a distinct handicap to the spread of religion—whatever effect they may have on attendance statistics at any particular Church.

Religion must be simply expressed for the understanding of the people. It is not homeliness but vulgarity that injures it. Surely it is only at the peril of our own souls that we neglect the solemn reverential fear of the Lord which should be the beginning of all our words and activities. Chatty religion is impossible if we have any adequate knowledge of God.

MEANS AND ENDS

Combining spiritual things with spiritual words.
—I Corinthians 2: 13.

There is no more pernicious doctrine in all the world than that which teaches that the end justifies the means. Marking the breakdown of personal morality, it indicates the ultimate destruction of all that man holds dear.

It is the most perfect illustration of atheism, for if man, by the conscious, deliberate doing of evil may produce good, then is the earth still waste and void, nor has God ever moved upon the face of "The Waters."

Most of us realize this truth in the abstract, but fail to perceive it in certain particular instances. Believing our goal to be desirable, we are not much inclined to hesitate at using whatever means may be necessary to reach it. That attitude carries a fine air of conviction with it, but in the realm of the mind it signifies chaos.

Perhaps the most obvious illustration in our day lies in the use of speech and writing. How often alas! do we speak or write in a manner and with a use of language that defeats our avowed spiritual purpose!

Preachers labour industriously for the Kingdom of God, but defeat their purpose by the use of denunciatory and complaining speech.

Articles on behalf of some reform are written and "literature!" is disseminated which, whatever their power in the realm of the things which are seen and temporal, bring defeat to the spiritual cause.

Isn't it about time to combine our treatment of spiritual things with spiritual words?

ON BEING A MAN

We also are men of like passions with you.—Acts 14: 15.

There is something great about this declaration of Paul and Barnabas. When the crowd, overwhelmed with wonder at the cure of the lame man, worshipped the Apostles as gods they promptly denied the silly imputation of divinity.

And yet how easy and natural to have accepted the tribute. They might even have persuaded themselves that it would be good publicity for their cause.

But no; these were plain honest disciples. They preferred being known as men of like passions with all others. Around themselves they drew no veil of mystery; they accepted no personal tributes of flattering popularity. They were men; the glory and honour were Christ's.

A little later their enemies from other cities following them stoned Paul with the consent and possibly with the help of those who had desired a moment before to worship them. Perhaps if they had received the attribute of divinity Paul might have been spared. But no pose was possible for them. They knew that they were men.

To accept the popular tribute of being more than a man has wrecked many a good career, but it has never yet produced a superman.

It is important to know what a man is and to realize that you are one.

The first condition of achievement in any career is to be a man—neither a god, nor a beast, nor a machine.

CALCULATED RELIGION

I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get.
—Luke 18: 12.

The Pharisee who made this declaration was both pious and generous according to the external standard. In fasting and giving he exceeded the requirements of his law.

The trouble with him was not in what he did, but in his attitude toward it. He was offering a careful report on his religious practices as a justification for self-complacency. He was boasting, but thought he was praying. Small wonder that he makes such a sorry figure beside the despised publican who, despite his acknowledged sin, at least recognized penitence as the first approach to God.

For religion cannot be reduced to carefully calculated performances by which a man is entitled to declare his rating before God. Such an attempt reveals a total ignorance of the nature and requirements of religion. Religion can never be measured by its practices, though its sincerity may be witnessed by deeds.

Is there not a danger today lest in the zeal of organized religion we fall into calculating our benevolences, recording our religious observances, and neglecting the penitent cry of the heart which alone can bring us into the presence of God?

Surely it is no gain to a needy world to be filled with religious observances, or even social service, if they are to be rendered null and void by a pharisaic heart.

If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.—Ecclesiastes 10: 10.

"Nothing," said Carlyle, "is more terrible than activity without insight."

The tragedy of life is not hardship, labour, suffering; but meaninglessness, emptiness, effort without objective. The fever-racked man who aimlessly passes through the motions of his accustomed daily conduct is a pitiable object. How much more so those whose daily conduct is merely the expression of the fever of life.

Only the man whose activity is directed by a great purpose can be fundamentally happy. Life easily degenerates into the mere dance of death unless it be intelligently directed. Behind the expenditure of the precious energy of life there must be the highest degree of wisdom. Otherwise that energy which can never be recaptured is wasted.

This is no question of efficiency in the narrow sense. No lazy desire to avoid effort, as an end in itself. No selfish desire to increase power for private profit. It is merely the recognition of the infinite value of the passing phenomenon of strength for spiritual purposes.

Until a man has learned to direct his energies in accordance with heavenly wisdom he is only beating the air with feverish but futile effort.

To spend a few minutes sharpening the axe will not only spare an aching back, but it will make the job pleasant and perhaps afford a moment or so for reflection.

Insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy.—I Peter 4: 13.

The New Testament presentation of Christianity is continually startling men with its frank recognition of difficulties. Here is no endeavour to conceal the cost of being a Christian. Here is honest, direct facing of the requirements, and exuberant confidence in the ultimate outcome.

We are told plainly, in many places, that Christ died for men, yet not for the object of saving men from suffering and death, but for the purpose of spiritual salvation.

The Christian invitation is not to escape suffering by following Christ, but to become cheerful partakers of his sufferings, that we may also rejoice exceedingly at the revelation of his glory.

The trouble with our Christianity is that it is easy-going. We are afflicted with an unreasonable cultural optimism. We are not yet fully aware that Christianity, unless it is to leave out Jesus and his earliest disciples, is a fellowship of suffering and not a mere profit-sharing plan.

Insofar as our religion is showing itself inadequate today it is for this reason. On the one hand it is futile to present the teaching of Jesus apart from his person and life. And on the other, it is inane to talk of following him without entering into his sufferings. The way of the cross was an integral element of Jesus' life. In human measure it must be shared by his disciples.

THE COST OF ETERNAL LIFE

Teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?—Matthew 19: 16.

The rich young man was in a serious mood. He did not ask this question that he might prove himself entitled to eternal life by the performance of some prescribed deed. He was already a good man, in the narrow meaning of the term. But he knew in his heart that something was wrong since he lacked the consciousness of eternal life.

Jesus, physician of the souls of men, diagnosed his one trouble as the love of great possessions and advised the prompt removal of the obstruction by the sale of his goods and generous giving to the poor. The young man was unwilling to accept the prescription and went away sorrowful. He wanted eternal life—but not at that price. He felt the need of something beyond even his good manner of life, but he couldn't quite make the sacrifice required to obtain it.

How many of us find ourselves in that same situation!

We live a decent life, but we experience the lack of that eternal life which we feel ought to be ours. Something stands between us and our rightful heritage. But when it is pointed out to us, we cannot make the necessary sacrifice.

If we do not prize eternal life above every other thing in the world, it is evident that we are incapable of having it.

COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE

The Lord's servant must . . . be.....apt to teach.
—II Timothy 2:24.

It is quite one thing to know certain facts or hold certain convictions and quite another thing to be able to communicate them to others. A man may know his subject thoroughly and yet be a poor teacher. The ability to teach is a particular gift requiring special attention for its development.

Take this idea in its simplest form: i. e., asking the way.

You are travelling in the back country and desire information about the road. How far is it to such-and-such a place, and what forks are there in the road? Suppose you are inquiring of a man who has been many times over the way, even so, the chances are good that he can't tell you the actual distance or that he will omit some important item in describing your route. Take him with you over the road and he'll guide you without hesitation. But ask him to tell you how to travel it for yourself,—and that is another story.

Most of us have this same kind of difficulty in the primary business of religion. We find it hard to communicate our experience to others.

Perhaps we need in the first place to clarify and organize our ideas so that they will be communicable.

Perhaps we need to put ourselves by sympathy in the other man's place so that we can speak to his requirements instead of meandering around in inadequate reminiscences of the way.

AM I NEEDED?

Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?—Esther 4: 14.

When Esther, the exiled Jewish maiden, became by a sudden chance queen and consort to King Ahasuerus, Mordecai, her foster father, saw in the influence of her position the one hope of foiling the plot against his fellow Jews.

It was a perilous role on which Mordecai besought the young queen to enter, but his knowledge of human nature was revealed in the final words of his appeal: "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

The challenge to usefulness was irresistible. Esther accepted it: "I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

The same quality appears all through sound and sane human nature. The surest challenge to heroic action in any human being is the conviction that he is needed to do some particular thing. With that assurance most men or women will face anything, endure anything.

The head of a great school for nurses retired recently from active service with these remarks upon the beginning of her career:

"I suddenly began to feel myself a needed person. There was a whole hospital full of sick people who wanted to get back to work and healthy living. There were suffering and misery to relieve. This feeling of being needed gives the nurse or any one else the finest satisfaction in life."

Are you a needed person? If not, can't you become one?

DO IT NOW

Straightway he called them.—Mark 1:20.

It is said that one of the striking characteristics of that great and good man, Sir William Osler, was his promptness in following up every purpose that his fertile brain produced. He was assiduous in looking up information when anything unfamiliar came to his attention. He was constantly making memoranda for doing things which he could not immediately attend to. He was prompt in carrying out the good impulses that teemed in his generous heart. He never neglected worthy ideas, nor delayed the performance for which they called.

A quotation often on his lips was this from Macbeth:

> "The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
> Unless the deed go with it."

Is this not one of the secrets of greatness? Certainly it is not a common characteristic of men.

We have an impulse to send a note to a friend. But postpone it and perhaps forget it.

We encounter a noble idea in conversation or a book. But let it slide through our leaky minds.

We hear or read a strange word or idea. Instead of turning to the dictionary or other book of reference or making a note for later investigation, we let it go.

Is it any wonder that our minds grow dull or that we are oppressed with the sense of unfulfilled purposes? Greatness may not be within our reach, but mental growth is. And no one need be oppressed by the haunting memory of unaccepted opportunities.

THE END SURE, THE TIME UNCERTAIN

It is appointed unto men once to die.—Hebrews 9: 27.

The one thing that is absolutely sure in our earthly life is that it must end in that mysterious change which we call death. No possible escape from this conclusion! No other way on or out!

The heart which has pumped the blood through our bodies so steadily will cease to work. The eyes which have looked upon so many things will be darkened. The lips which have uttered our thoughts and feelings will be sealed with silence. This is " the unexempt condition of our mortal frailty."

It would seem as if such an inevitable end must cast a shadow upon our whole existence. But not so does the Christian faith interpret it. It is a stimulus to life while we live, because although the end is sure the time is uncertain. Make the best of every day of grace.

Death does not annihilate. After this cometh the judgment of the wise and holy God which we must prepare to meet. Beyond this mortal being Christ lives, who bore our sins on the cross, and who shall appear to them that wait for him, unto salvation.

Let us remember death, but fear it not!

THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

For freedom did Christ set us free.—Galatians 5 : 1.

Nothing is more important for a man to understand than what it means to be free. Liberty, like all things worth having, is a dangerous gift. It may lead us to heights of undreamed bliss. It may thrust us into the deepest of dungeons. Everything depends on whether we exercise or abuse freedom.

Individualism run riot is not freedom. Disregard of all convention may become enslavement just as much as stupid conventionality. To do what you please may lead to the worst of all imprisonments—self-enslavement. Like every virtue, freedom is closely shadowed by a vice. That is the real meaning of the old saying: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

But if we are to be free we must not only avoid the abuse of freedom; we must exercise freedom. For liberty is not an abstract entity to be captured and held between the thumb and fingers. It is a transforming virtue in a man to be exercised or at once lost.

If you have been set free, show it in life: think, speak, act as a free man. It is for this purpose that Christ sets men free,—that we may live beyond reach of fear and favour.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

I

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?
—Jeremiah 12: 5.

Suppose something out of the ordinary hum-drum of life happened to you. Suppose you were jerked up to face a sudden danger, or caught in an unexpected difficulty, or subjected to an unusual trial. Suppose a real crisis, a final test of your courage and quality, raised its head above the walls of commonplace which guard our everyday life. How would you behave?

"Ah," you say, "these are mere imaginations, not real practical questions. Why cross the bridge before we come to it? We can't tell what we would do in a case that has not yet come to us."

But you see, as the French proverb says, "It is the unexpected that always happens."

And then, if and when it comes, our behaviour is not a matter of chance. It is the result of a certain unconscious preparation and training. It is the act that reveals the inmost quality of the person. It is the acid test of character.

"What would you do?" is no mere imaginary question. It means, what are you doing now?

When we come to that uncrossed bridge it may be only a single narrow plank. Are we learning to walk straight and steady?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

II

Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.
—Acts 27: 31.

Perhaps you have already been in a shipwreck, or a near-shipwreck. If so, you know what you did,—whether you were a help or a hindrance, whether you played the coward or the encourager, whether you thought of yourself only or of your shipmates.

In this classic wreck on the shore of Malta long ago, the calm little prisoner Paul was the hero. He did not care whether he lived or died; but he wanted the ship's company, sailors, soldiers, and passengers to stick together and do their best to pull through. "Be of good cheer," he said, "and let no man desert his post."

Isn't it just the same in the daily hum-drum? Are we thinking only of ourselves, or also of the other people? Do we realize that their lives are just as dear to them as our lives are to us?

Don't scream when the car skids. You may demoralize the chauffeur, who wants to live as much as you do.

If we can't control ourselves we are hardly worth saving.

But self-control in the great emergencies is learned daily in the small affairs of life. "For the good of the ship" is the motto.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

III

And Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away unto Cyprus.—Acts 15: 39.

Paul and Barnabas had been good friends and had worked happily together in the Gospel. But Barnabas liked a man named John Mark and wanted to take him along with them. Paul thought, from experience, that he was a quitter, a slacker, and declined to take him. So Barnabas left Paul and sailed away with his own favourite. Paul said nothing, but simply carried on with his work, choosing Silas as his helper and comrade.

It is a thing that may happen to any of us,—to be deserted by a friend. It hurts. But the measure of the damage depends on how we take it.

What does it matter whether we were right or the former friend was right? The question is, are we strong enough to carry on without his loved support?

There is no need to quarrel with him or blame him. Our refuge is in our work. He takes one road, we take another. The goal is not changed.

Wish him Godspeed. Push ahead. If you are really working in earnest your work will bring you new companions. Where the trails meet again your old friend will greet you with joy. Friendship does not mean uniformity of opinion, but unity of purpose and mutual good will.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

IV

If riches increase, set not your heart thereon.—Psalm 62: 10.

Riches is a comparative term. Some millionaires feel poor beside the multimillionaires. Goldsmith's country parson was

"Passing rich with forty pounds a year."

It is all a matter of relativity. I suppose that wealth reduced to its lowest terms means a bit more of income than the necessary outgo.

Probably most of our readers have that, otherwise they could not have bought this book.

But what would you do, friend, if you had a great deal more than that, if you were living on Easy Street?

Suppose you got the big promotion which you are trying to earn. Suppose a fabulous legacy came to you. Suppose your careful investments turned out to be profitable speculations and you moved from Easy Street to Aristocrat Avenue. What would you do?

Judge by what you are doing now. Are you helpful to your less fortunate neighbours? Are you ready, not merely to drop a quarter into a beggar's hat, but to give a dollar to a good cause?

Remember the camel and the needle's eye. Riches would ruin you, unless you had learned to be a good steward.

V

Is any among you suffering? let him pray.—James 5 : 13.

Health is the normal condition of life, just as peace is the normal state of the world. But war comes to the world, and sickness comes to the individual. The important question is not why does it come, but how shall we meet it?

To be seriously ill is trying to a real man or woman just because it is abnormal. It involves pain, it stops work, it abolishes pleasure, it destroys independence. How shall we bear it?

Well, the answer depends on how we have learned to bear the small "slings and arrows" of fortune in the hum-drum of life.

Has the sting of every insect seemed to us a personal outrage? Has every twinge of a nerve been like a cruel injustice? Have we resented every physical pain as something unmerited and hostile? Then a serious illness may be a calamity to us, and nothing else.

But if we have learned to take small aches and pains merely as "rubs of the green," if we have cherished the spirit of patience and hope in minor adversities, then a serious illness may be a blessing in disguise.

It may teach us how frail we are. It may enable us to help the doctor and the nurse, God willing, to bring us back to life and work. Therefore pray when you are sick.

VI

The time of my departure is come.—II Timothy 4: 6.

No man can predict the hour of his death. That it is coming is sure, but when it will arrive he does not know. Yet there are certain signs and omens which bring him face to face with it.

Old age which has its limits: a disease for which the doctors know no remedy: a decree of the court (as in Paul's case) against which there is no appeal.

How shall we meet this stark fact? How shall we behave in this inexorable presence?

Well, beloved, it seems to me that we must behave just as we have behaved in all the other crises of life,—any one of which might have been final. If we have gone through calamity and sickness and pain and separation without flinching, why should we not go through this last door?

If I knew that I had to die next week, I should try to finish my work and put all affairs in order, to say a cheerful good-bye to those who love me, and then to slip out quietly on the new voyage trusting absolutely and only in our divine pilot, Jesus Christ.

MORAL SENSE

Rejoice in Jehovah, O ye righteous:
Praise is comely for the upright.

—Psalm 33: 1.

In many ways ours is a restless, unhappy age. The reason is not hard to find. It lies in our lack of moral sense. On the one hand, many people see life and their relationship to God and man from a totally non-moral point-of-view. This pagan attitude receives such continuous denunciation from the pulpit and the religious press that I may be pardoned for passing it by. It is an obvious evil.

But there is another side to the picture. If some people are totally blind to moral issues, others are equally wrong in continually discovering moral issues where none exist. Such an attitude makes for a ridiculous degree of self-consciousness and produces a terribly inflamed condition of the conscience.

For people suffering from this disease all the joy is gone out of life; and God, far from being our heavenly Father, is viewed as a mean and tricky task-master.

There are lots of things in the world which are merely matters of taste or temperament. They have nothing to do with morality. You will never find the meaning of religion and experience the joy of salvation if you go around measuring yourself and your neighbours with the imaginary foot-rule of manufactured moral issues.

OUR OBLIGATION TO THE PAST

And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.—Hebrews 11: 39-40.

Most of the attention we give to the past in these vigorous but not very thoughtful days, is directed toward denying its authority over us. Doubtless it is true that the bald fact that things used to be thus and so, is not a sufficient reason why they should continue thus and so forever. But neither is it a sufficient reason why they should not so continue. Let us turn from this futile though popular discussion, which can never be decided in the abstract but only by the consideration of concrete cases, and let us consider the much neglected issue of our duty toward the past.

Apart from us, the lives of the heroes of the past are incomplete, imperfect. It is a sobering thought. Not; what has the past done for us? but; what ought we to do for those who have lived and died before us?

At first glimpse, it seems an absurd issue. What obligation have we got toward those who have lived their lives and are now dead? But the more we reflect on it the truer it appears. No man's work is ever completed in his own lifetime. It goes on endlessly through the ages toward perfection; or it remains forever incomplete because the following generations are faithless to their duty.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Honour thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise) . . . And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.—Ephesians 6: 2, 4.

We need to remind ourselves that this question of relationship between the older and the younger generations is not a new thing; and that there are two sides to the question; and still further that all sensible people belong on both sides.

Let us be frank without being partisan. There can be no doubt about it, this commandment for children to honour their parents is primarily addressed to children and is not intended to afford support to tyrannical parents. Lest there be misunderstanding about it, Paul has added to the admonition, " Children obey your parents," the phrase " in the Lord." He wishes it to be understood that he is not suggesting that anything a parent commands must invariably be law for his child. And this he supplements with a direct counsel to fathers not to provoke their children.

From all of which it ought to be perfectly clear that parental discipline is founded, not on abstract ideas of authority, but on that superior ability to govern and teach which age and experience may reasonably be expected to give.

On the other hand, it is equally evident that the commandment definitely forbids children to set up their very limited experience and inadequate thought against their parents,—for reasons which any one, except spoilt children, will readily comprehend.

Perhaps the solution lies in children and parents spending more time together both in work and play, and thus learning to respect each other.

ONLOOKERS

The people stood beholding.—Luke 23:35.

Before Christ on the cross the people were mere onlookers. The terrible battle of man and God with sin and death was just a spectacle,—a sight to behold.

There were of course a few who felt and understood and learned something in that dreadful hour. But the crowd, the general populace, were only onlookers. Doubtless at one moment or other a thrill of pity passed through their frames, but they acted as if they were in no sense personally concerned in the event.

This is the characteristic attitude of the crowd. People in the mass feel that they have no responsibility. As onlookers they have no personal concern in that which holds their attention.

But can it be true that the audience, the onlookers, are just neutrals?

Is there not a moral responsibility involved in being an onlooker? What do you think of the Roman populace that thronged the Colosseum for its bloody spectacles?

Well, let's bring it up to date. What about the position of the audience at a prize fight, or at a vulgar show or a suggestive play? Can you blame it all on the fighters, the actors, the promoters?

In real life no one can escape responsibility by becoming an onlooker. For every one is an actor and has a part to play.

THE LIMITS OF OMNIPOTENCE

Love never faileth.—I Corinthians 13:8.

Perhaps the weakest point in our knowledge of God is our misapprehension of his omnipotence.

We confuse omnipotence with arbitrary power. We argue in the abstract about omnipotence apart from consistency of character. And we end up with the most frightful caricature of God.

We must begin rightly with the faith that Jesus taught us that all things are possible with God. And then we must observe (what Jesus also taught us) that the power of God is not arbitrary but consistent, that God is carrying out his will for and through men by the self-imposed limitation inherent in love.

He cannot make evil good; he cannot make the false true. He cannot violate the sacred rights of personality. Such limitations are the very evidence of moral omnipotence.

For love is the one thing that can never fail. It can be delayed, thwarted temporarily. It can suffer and even die—temporarily. In the end love rises up again and finally wins the victory.

The limits of omnipotence are set by love which never faileth.

A GREEN OLD AGE

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age;
They shall be full of sap and green:
To show that Jehovah is upright;
He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him.
—Psalm 92: 14.

I hear it said so often and by such unqualified persons that this is a young man's world that I have become thoroughly sceptical on the issue. I observe that many men and women of advanced years are more than holding their own with youth; and I note that where youth is making progress which bears the marks of permanency there are usually some of the old boys around.

Do you know the story of Thomas Mayhew who became Governor of the island of Martha's Vineyard in 1642? His son was ordained to the ministry and established a very successful work notably among the Indians. In all this his father lent encouragement and practical assistance. Finding himself in need of funds the younger man started on a trip to England to interest some people there, but was lost at sea. His father on receipt of the sad news decided to take up his son's work, and although he was already seventy years old he began the study of the Indian language and went about preaching at the various plantations and finally organized the first Indian Church with an Indian pastor. This work he kept up till he died in his ninetieth year in 1682. And it is said that during the forty years he lived among them as Governor and missionary the Indians and the white men were continuously at peace.

MAKING YOURSELF A NUISANCE

Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbour's house,
Lest he be weary of thee, and hate thee.

—Proverbs 25: 17.

This is not a plea for unneighbourliness. It is a warning against making yourself a nuisance. To concern yourself too much with your neighbour is not a sign of interest in him, but an indication of thinking too much of yourself. There is a great difference between making a friendly visit and hanging around all the time. Sometimes your neighbour is busy with affairs which do not concern you. If you love him, you'll leave him alone. There is a privacy which the best of friends do not violate. Indeed that is one reason why they are friends.

Peeping and prying is always a despicable activity even when it is practised under the guise of friendship or neighbourliness.

It is usually a fault common to those who are not very busy themselves and who like to lean on the activity of others.

Especially must we beware of making this error in trying to win men to religion. To be perseverant in following after a soul walking in darkness is a virtue. But to pursue him in such fashion that he comes to hate the light is a disastrous error.

There is an attitude which is neither showing yourself indifferent nor constituting yourself a nuisance. It is founded on a deep regard for your neighbour's happiness and a supreme unconcern about getting your own way.

PROGRAMMES AND PEOPLE

Jehovah said unto Gideon, By the three hundred that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thy hand.—Judges 7:7.

When Gideon was called by the angel of the Lord to save Israel from the land of Midian, he promptly developed a plan of procedure. But he did not set up a campaign and accept anybody who came along for a share in it. He picked his men with great care. Twice he went over the men who flocked to his standard and for the first attack on the enemy he reduced his force from 32,000 to 300 men.

It is a procedure that deserves our attention today. Too many theoretical idealists are at large laying down programmes for all the rest of humanity without regard to the qualifications of men for taking part in their programmes. Their intentions are excellent but their ideals are futilitarian—not because they aim too high for men, but because they do not begin where the men are.

No programme will work without properly qualified men. And just as much attention ought to be paid to selecting those men as to preparing the programme.

The chief need in our age, as probably in every other age, is better men. If the millennium as a social programme were suddenly put into effect among us it would produce disaster. Let the good work of preparation and selection go on. Every man is good for something, but no man can be qualified for everything.

FOR WHOM ARE PRIVILEGES?

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you.—Matthew 7:6.

We hear a great deal today about what are called "under-privileged groups." No one who looks upon humanity with genuine sympathy can doubt that there are such people. They deserve far more attention than they receive. But we ought to realize that the indiscriminate extension of privileges is not the real object of philanthropy. For any gift to be beneficial to any person, there must be a corresponding capacity on the part of the recipient to make good use of it.

And just there lies the trouble with much of our social organization. It lacks discrimination in the distribution of its privileges. Money left to a fool is certainly not a benefit. To send a loafer to college is a doubtful privilege unless you present him also with a few well-calculated mental jolts.

To provide opportunities and privileges for those who are incapable of exercising them beneficially or who will abuse them, is folly of the most supreme variety.

The distribution of privileges under the present social order is undoubtedly far from justice. But will it get any better if we rush to the other extreme and attempt to give the same things to everybody, regardless of their qualifications for receiving them?

HIDDEN POTENTIALITIES

Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.—Judges 6: 12.

Probably that form of address was a great surprise to young Gideon. For he was apparently a modest, simple-hearted youth who pondered the ill-fortunes of his people in bondage to the Midianites but did not yet realize the part that he was to play in their liberation. Unlike many people he did not think of himself as a hero. Perhaps that is why the angel of God perceived heroic qualities in him.

Very possibly Gideon did not look like a hero. But then, heroism has a way of bobbing up in most unlikely persons. Certainly he was engaged in a very commonplace task when the call came. He was ingloriously beating out wheat in the wine press in order to hide it from the Midianites. But under that uncouth exterior and amid those ordinary labours the angel saw the qualities that were to make him the saviour of his people.

Most men—more especially those of a humble spirit—have hidden potentialities of some sort. Recall the boys with whom you used to play—particularly the awkward, shy boys ridiculed and slighted by their companions. How often does it happen that these are now the ones who are accomplishing things and rendering service to men.

If we could read character aright we should be saluting many an ordinary looking boy as a mighty man of valour.

POSTPONED DUTIES

When I have a convenient season, I will call thee unto me.—Acts 24: 25.

Felix, the Roman Governor, for all his pomp and authority was terrified. He trembled before his prisoner.

Paul, reasoning of righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, reached his conscience. This was a real experience for both men.

Felix saw what the inevitable outcome would be if he faced the duty that Paul set, not only before him, but before the whole world. So he did what most of us do under similar circumstances. He postponed the decision to a convenient season. So far as we know the convenient season never came.

It never does come for anybody. You simply cannot postpone a duty. You can only refuse it. And when you refuse it you have taken the most effective way of damaging yourself.

How many of the sorrows and anxieties of life come from " postponed " duties.

Tomorrow is never what we think it will be. In that sense tomorrow never comes. Today we think we will be happy and please ourselves. Tomorrow we will do our duty. But we only make ourselves wretched pleasure-seekers.

For human nature is fundamentally such that it can only find enduring gladness in the incidental accompaniments of duty performed today.

THE ART OF PLODDING

They shall walk, and not faint.—Isaiah 40: 31.

"I can plod," said William Carey, "that is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."

As a result of this "plodding" he advanced in sixty years from a poor cobbler's apprentice at the age of thirteen, to die at seventy-three not only one of the most distinguished Englishmen of his country, but the establisher of the modern world missionary movement.

A master of many Indian dialects, a notable translator and teacher, a real contributor to the science of botany, a great disciple of Christ—he was able to walk and not faint.

It is a great quality, this ability to keep indefinitely pushing on toward the goal even though the pace seem intolerably slow. It is the quality celebrated in the fable of the race which the tortoise won from the hare.

To keep on patiently plodding along is the attitude of those who, in the words of Isaiah, wait for the Lord. They alone can endure the strain of an almost imperceptible advance. Only they can run without weariness and likewise perform the far more exacting task of plodding industriously without becoming discouraged. Certainly it is one aspect of genius that it is "the infinite capacity for taking pains."

WAYSIDE PLEASURES

He that hath mercy on them will lead them, even by springs of water will he guide them.—Isaiah 49: 10.

One reason why life looks so pleasureless to many people is because they make pleasure the main object of living. For to set out to capture pleasure only means that it will straightway elude you; its very essence lies in its unexpected and incidental nature.

There is only one basis for really enjoying life, and that is, to walk in the way in which God leads you. Then you are prepared to find delight in all sorts of wayside incidents.

For one thing, the ability of the senses to enjoy anything depends as much on the tone of the mind as on any external happening. Some people are like Peter Bell of whom Wordsworth wrote:

> "A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."

When a man is drifting through life, seeking nothing outside of self-gratification, the world must become increasingly a barren and forbidding wilderness.

But it is wonderful how many delights fall to the lot of him who is led by God. For such a one the clasp of a friend's hand, a cool drink in the heat of noon, a merry salutation from a passing traveller, a glimpse of beauty by the road, a quiet resting-place at night, are all full of unspeakable pleasure.

PLAY

The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.—Zechariah 8: 5.

What a pretty picture that is! You can almost hear the shouts and laughter of happy voices and see the merry dancing rings of children.

Let us stop a moment and meditate on this lovely scene which the prophet describes as taking place in "the city of truth."

Play is no small thing in bringing happiness to human life. That's why most boys and girls enjoy life more than men and women. We allow the joints of our minds to become stiffened with dignity or pride or anxiety. We are afraid or unwilling to let go and disport ourselves. We have stunted our imaginations so that the streets of our own city instead of being a playground and wonderland of adventure seem a dull and drab prison house.

Surely those of us who are grown-up children need to play. Why not! Is it inconsistent with a due sense of responsibility? Is it the mark of a frivolous mind?

Look at the men and women who are succeeding in work of any sort that bears the human touch. Do they not turn and become, when the chance offers, carefree playing children?

Play is quite as important to human life as work. The pompous, unbending individual and the mean cynical fellow are human misfits. They may exist but they cannot live.

THE SACREDNESS OF PERSONALITY

The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.—I Corinthians 3:17 (margin).

The use of churches, even under the stress of war conditions, for other purposes than worship always arouses great indignation among religious people.

And yet, although it is evident to all spiritually-minded persons that the abiding-place of God is in mankind rather than in buildings, many people fail to take the action requisite to prevent the continual debauching of the minds and bodies of men. Indeed, there are not a few who claim the right to employ their own minds and bodies in any manner they desire and the minds and bodies of other people in whatever manner they are able.

We greatly need a fresh realization of the holiness of men's persons as the temple of God in order to put an end to these violations of sanctuary. For no one can estimate the endless troubles which arise from this abuse of personality through the employment of human life for our own selfish ends instead of recognizing it as the abiding-place of God in the Spirit.

And doubtless if we paid more attention to educating ourselves and our children in the acceptance of the sacredness of personality we should be released from much silly fussing over the spurious modern panacea of censorship.

PERSONAL TROUBLES AND PRAYER FOR OTHERS

Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.—Job 42: 10.

There is nothing so liberating as a sincere concern for other people. Most of the prisons in which men find themselves locked up are built in part by themselves.

If you really desire spiritual liberty, pray for your friends. The charter of personal liberty belongs to the man whose life is given to his friends.

"He that loseth his life shall find it."

The man whose universe centres about himself must always be a slave.

Altruism is not disinterested except in the purely selfish sense. It is the road to freedom. But will we take it?

The youth becomes preoccupied with his own sensations and reactions. He deals with other people only for their effect upon himself. Little by little life shuts him in, till suddenly he hears the iron door clang to and the bolts make it fast.

The old man thrusts life away from him. He will dwell alone with memory. His shell hardens over him till suddenly he finds the very breath of life cut off.

There is no peace that way. Our lives can only be free when they are concerned with our friends.

The end of many troubles comes when we step out of the prison of self and find spiritual liberation in earnest prayer for our friends.

Have you tried it lately?

PRINCES OF PETTINESS

Ye tithe mint and rue and every herb, and pass over justice and the love of God.—Luke 11:42.

It is always easy to be busy, but it requires greatness to select the things that are worth being busy about.

How facilely we concern ourselves about secondary things. The ancient Pharisees are not the only people who were meticulous about details and careless of first principles.

Many a man forgets that the object of his labour is life—and wastes himself on the detail of money-making.

Many a woman forgets that the object for which she manages her household is the happiness and well-being of the family,—and worries and frets over minor irregularities until everyone is miserable.

Many a preacher forgets that his purpose in the church is to bring the Gospel to the souls of men and establish it there—and gets lost in the mazes of committees and other details of organization.

And most of us find one way or another of falling away from the important things and pouring out time and effort over secondary things. In fact one of the chief excuses we offer ourselves for failing to act in primary obligations is that we are too busy over details of living. We are ready to fuss, but not to decide. We are concerned to dress well, but we neglect our minds. We spend a good deal of time over our reputation, but not much on our characters.

In fact many of us are in serious danger of becoming princes of pettiness.

THE DELUSION OF PERFECTIONISM

Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.—Matthew 5: 48.

Nothing is commoner among small-minded men than the delusion of perfectionism. To hear some of them talk you would think that it would be next to impossible to pick a flaw in their conduct.

But every honest man knows (to put it mildly) that even the best of men has his weaknesses.

What, then, is the meaning of this declaratory command of Jesus? It cannot be a word spoken to tantalize us with the impossibility of fulfilment. It must have a practical bearing on our lives. To look for anything less would be to run counter to the whole spirit and purpose of Jesus' teaching.

How, then, shall we be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect? Perfection in the realm of action is evidently out of the question. But, thanks be to God, a man is not only what he does. Superior to the realm of conduct is that of character; beyond performance is motive and purpose. And here it is that we are called on to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Relatively to his capacity and condition a man may be perfect in the realm of character and purpose.

It is therefore incumbent on all serious-minded men to stop trying to dress up and defend their conduct, and concentrate on the establishment in their hearts of that love which alone makes perfect.

LIMITATIONS

Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.—Job 38: 11.

It is not only the sea to which God has set limits. Everything has its limits; even human nature.

And yet men will go on acting as if there were no end to their personal possibilities.

One of the first signs of intellectual maturity is the recognition of limitations.

The "city feller" may rather fancy himself in the garb of a cowboy. So far it is nothing but dressing up. But let him not forget that a cowboy's work is only for him who has something in him which is not native to all men.

The 250-pounder will not make a distance runner; nor the 110-pounder a footballer. No man is yet found who can remain continuously awake, or who can escape the need of food and drink.

In reality it is the part of cowardly egotism to refuse to recognize the limits of human nature and in particular our own limitations.

There is no need to be apologetic about such limitations as are inherent in your nature unless you are failing to make the most of what possibilities you have.

For the first step in overcoming limitations is to recognize them.

Even if you can't lift a rock with your arms and back, you may have brains enough to use a lever.

The result is the same.

Moses went up into the mount, and the cloud covered the mount.—Exodus 24:15.

Every one who climbs mountains is familiar with the fact that the high peaks are frequently hidden in the clouds. How often a climbing expedition sets out from the valley in warm, lovely weather and ends up on the peak that was its goal enveloped in cold fog and rain and snow. The beautiful view that was anticipated is hidden. Perhaps it may open up for a momentary glimpse. Perhaps it may be veiled till the expedition must return. Sometimes just as the valley is reached the cloud that shrouded the peak suddenly is torn aside and the climbers are tantalized with the thought of what they have missed. That is one of the uncertainties of mountaineering.

Nor is it any different in the realm of spiritual living. There are moods that like clouds may veil our view as we clamber to the spiritual heights. Sometimes they are quite unpredictable. The factors that make spiritual weather, like meteorological conditions, are not yet known as an exact science.

But perhaps if we dealt with moods as the mountaineer deals with weather conditions, we should be far wiser and happier. Especially on the heights there are many uncertainties. But the view is there if we will keep on climbing the mountain till we get it.

Clouds do not permanently obliterate landscape, nor moods the vision of faith.

SPONTANEOUS PRAYER

The King said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of Heaven. And I said unto the King, If it please the king . . ., etc.—Nehemiah 2: 4-5.

It was a critical moment for Nehemiah. The unspoken thoughts of his heart had left an impress on his face and the king took note of the expression of his cupbearer. What did he want? Then Nehemiah knew that he must speak out and risk his secret concern for his own people on the king's sympathy.

Observe then what he did. He prayed to the God of Heaven and spoke to the king—to all intents and purposes simultaneously. It was no sonorous balanced prayer that Nehemiah uttered in that brief pause between the King's question and his polite but bold request that he be permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it. There was no time for anything but the swift spontaneous prostration of his soul before God.

What was that prayer? An impulsive "God help me"? No one knows. Perhaps it was so swift that there were no words, just a rush of the spirit into the solemn and gracious abiding presence of God to receive courage and hope.

Do you ever feel that our religion is too much limited to formal observances and state occasions? Consider the needs of mankind as a whole. Pageant and ceremonial have a place there. But neither they nor anything else can take the place of that spontaneous, trustful casting of the soul upon God in every time of need.

UNANSWERED PRAYERS

Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.—Luke 22:42.

In one of our familiar hymns is a line of touching beauty and pathos:

"Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer."

Everyone who has implored the sparing of a well-beloved life that seemed to be passing away, everyone who has begged relief from some sharp trial, some great calamity, some slowly creeping painful illness, knows how hard it is to leave the petition ungranted and rise to the day's work with unshaken faith and courage.

That is what the hymn means. No one has really prayed who does not understand and feel its deep significance. Underneath all our true supplications there must lie the confidence that God knows what is best, and He may not see the matter as we do. He has more light. The best of all things is that His will should be done.

But is the prayer really *unanswered* just because the response is delayed, or different from what we wanted? If patience comes into our hearts is not that in itself a beautiful and glorious answer?

Patience is a form of love which endureth all things. Patience is a mode of faith which overcometh the world.

I think there are no unanswered prayers.

Only there are some which are answered at another time and in a different way from what we expected.

RICHES AS A HANDICAP

How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!—Mark 10: 23.

An old Vermont farmer was talking with a young neighbour. The young man was complaining because the devil's paint-brush (that bright but destructive weed) was ruining his hay-crop. "Fertilize your land, my boy, fertilize your land," said the old man, "I've noticed that the devil's paint-brush is like lots of folks. It can't stand prosperity."

You see, the trouble is not in the prosperity itself, but in the character of the persons who meet it. Unless a man have stability of character, riches at once throw him off his balance. How often the frugal and hard-working youth is turned by the acquirement of riches into a hard and selfish old man! How often the man, whose first book written with care and devotion achieves success, degenerates into a merely popular author! How often the modest industrious woman is changed by prosperity into a vain and frivolous creature!

Prosperity is for most of us a terrible pitfall. Adversity seems usually to call forth the best that is in us.

What is it that will enable us to go through life master of the outward circumstances of both prosperity and hardship? Surely it is to follow in the way of Christ who came not to do his own will, but the will of God who sent him.

PERSEVERANCE

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.—Galatians 6: 9.

Most divisions among men are unreal, without essential justification. But the more I deal with men the more am I impressed with the importance of that division which separates men into "stickers" and "quitters." Again and again I find myself unable to discover any vital difference between two men except that one carries his undertaking through to a conclusion, while the other peters out somewhere along the way. Oftentimes the latter makes a better beginning than the former. But the ability to see a task through to the end is quite a different quality from the ability to undertake it.

Unless my acquaintance with people has been peculiar, it would seem that there are today a good many people, otherwise excellently qualified for valuable service, who lack the one quality of perseverence. They do not finish what they have begun. Often they are too impatient to see that time is an element in every valuable accomplishment. Some of them are continually "taking up" some new pursuit—and, as soon as the novelty wears off or the difficulties appear, laying it aside for something else. They never reap the benefits of what are frequently fine beginnings, because they will not stay long enough with their undertakings.

It is a great pity, because not only are many harvests unreaped, but also much bitterness and despair befall those who fail to endure unto the end.

PLAIN SPEECH

So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?—I Corinthians 14:9.

Many people, alas! do not employ speech for the purpose of revealing the truth, but often for the object of concealing it.

In fact this is one of the commonest ways of lying—not the direct statement of falsehood but so tortuous a use of language that men easily get the wrong idea of the facts. This is the method of educated crooks in deceiving simple folks. It is the procedure of the old secret diplomacy which was forever saying one thing and meaning another. It is the manner of a certain school of writers and speakers today who will talk or write fluently at great length; and when they stop the reader or the listener is in the same state as when the words began—except that he is feeling weary.

We do too much writing and talking for our own selfish satisfaction and without consideration for other people. The desire to express ourselves is no justification for inflicting meaningless words on a world already sufficiently confused. If we do not ourselves know what we are saying, surely it is reasonable to expect that no one else will understand.

Doubtless much confusion in the Church would cease if preachers employed only speech easy to be understood. The output of talk would be decreased; but who would grieve?

THE NECESSITY OF APPEARING RIDICULOUS

They laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do?—Nehemiah 2: 19.

One of the strongest feelings in most people is an instinctive aversion to appearing ridiculous. We are willing to do almost anything to escape being laughed at. In fact there are few more powerful weapons in the world than ridicule.

And yet the whole strength of ridicule lies in the weakness of the person attacked. In itself a laugh has no power at all.

When Nehemiah returned with the permission of the Persian king to rebuild Jerusalem the Bedawin chieftains who were profiting by the desolate condition of the city gathered about him and poured spiteful laughter on him for undertaking the colossal task. Doubtless it did look ridiculous. A handful of enthusiastic Jews planning the reconstruction of a destroyed city surrounded by scornful tribes of marauders like a ring of grinning jackals. And yet the ridiculous thing was done.

One of the first requirements for a doer of deeds is the ability to withstand ridicule. I would even go further and say that no one ever accomplished anything worth while without appearing foolish to some one. Certainly most progress in invention and discovery is made in the face of laughter. And what man ever carried out the will of God without looking ridiculous?

If you have never been called absurd you may be sure you have never done anything important.

RECIPE FOR RIOTS

Not only is there danger that this our trade come into disrepute; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana be made of no account.—Acts 19: 27.

Demetrius was a shrewd man according to his lights. He knew just what to do in order to stir up his fellow townsmen against the Apostle Paul's preaching. Climbing on whatever in those days occupied the place of the modern soap-box he mixed the one sure formula for riots; the appeal to self-interest backed by religious prejudice.

He pointed out that if Paul's preaching reached the hearts of the people the business of those who made the silver images of Diana would be ruined; and then justified the selfishness thus aroused by showing that it meant the despising and ultimate destruction " of the temple of the great goddess Diana . . . whom all Asia and the world worshippeth."

It was a first-rate demagogue's speech and inevitably led to the desired riot. But could it permanently stay the course of Paul's preaching?

Today the Gospel encircles the world. Diana's temple at Ephesus and the life of the silversmiths who lived on her trade are buried in the musty past.

The next time you hear a speaker appeal to people's self-interest and back it up with the sanctions of religious prejudice, beware. He is only brewing the old recipe for riots which is as potent today as ever.

PREACHING WITHOUT WORDS

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament showeth his handiwork.
—Psalm 19: 1.

Reading or listening to words does not provide the sole way of receiving ideas and comprehending truth. Or, if you prefer to put it so, there is another language in the world than the words of human speech.

Books and talk, after all, are only convenient ways for communicating what a man has learned from experience and observation of the world. Wisdom primarily lies not in the words but in what is behind them. Sincere writers and speakers know this and aim to help their hearers to listen for themselves to the wordless language of the universe.

Especially is this the case with religious truth. For the ultimate evidence for God in your soul or mine is not some other man's talk about Him, but the whole testimony of heaven and earth that comes directly home to our souls.

Do not misunderstand me. Words are vital for the formulation and communication of thought. But there are vital religious truths concerning which stars or trees are God's accredited prophets. Some of the finest sermons are wordless, though they usually send their hearers away with a few words to summon men to "hear" the original prophet.

Perhaps this is what our age needs. More listening to God's wordless sermons and less to men's verbose and inadequate arguments.

POPULAR BELIEF AND TRUTH

For what if some were without faith? Shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God?—Romans 3:3.

I am always much astonished to hear the argument developed against the claims of faith that "Nobody believes such things today." Probably the implication is that nobody as sensible as the speaker believes such things.

Well, there are plenty of things to consider in such a statement which I will pass by as irrelevant. But I must declare myself as not at all convinced that religious faith is on the decline. Rather am I confident that it is facing a period of purification from which it will emerge still more vigorous.

But the particular point that I wish to discuss here is the strange assumption that the general failure of people to believe indicates the folly of believing.

No more preposterous declaration could be made. And yet it is one of the commonest replies offered to the invitation to believe. It is often uttered by the superior young man who is quite sure that he is in the forefront of truth.

Stop a moment and consider its significance:

Supposing Columbus had taken that attitude to the faith knocking at his door but denied by all others.

Supposing Galileo had shut out the truth seeking entrance into his mind saying, Nobody believes that.

You see it is necessary that we deal with questions on their merits regardless of the attitude of other people. "The voice of the people is the voice of God" will hardly do as a motto for the man who is seeking truth.

The truth or falsehood of faith is not proved by its popularity or unpopularity.

THE VALUE OF ROUTINE

Jesus entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.—Luke 4: 16.

There is a prejudice abroad today in favour of erratic and irregular conduct—especially for ourselves. In some unaccountable way the idea of independence has become associated with it. Regularity and routine are condemned as dull and stupid and incompatible with being a man of spirit. While unaccountability is taken as the mark of spiritual power.

As a matter of fact, of course, irregularity and individualism may be just as much of a convention as regularity and formality; while spiritual grace is not invariably shown by lawless conduct.

In truth there is no standard way of living a spiritual life. The very examples of Jesus and his disciples are evidences of this. But I would like you to observe that as one way of developing spiritual power routine has a real value.

Regularity of private prayer, or of public worship need not make them stereotyped and conventional performances. It is not the external act that produces this undesirable effect. It is the inner attitude. If you are dull yourself, routine will make you duller still. But if you are wide awake the proper use of routine may be the means of discovering stability and depth in your spiritual nature and releasing power that would otherwise be lacking.

A WISE RULER

I am not minded to be a judge of these matters.—Acts 18: 15.

Among the most troublesome people in the world are the little groups of self-appointed vicegerents of God, who assert that they have the right to use government for the enforcement on everybody of their private views. Such groups are the parodists of freedom. Insisting on their right to their own opinions, they deny to others an equal right. They are not satisfied to have their ideas stand the test of public judgment. They do not ask a fair field for their legitimate propaganda. They demand the elimination of all competition.

Such was the group that came to Gallio when he was proconsul of Achaia, dragging the Apostle Paul with them. Paul had, in their eyes, performed the horrible heresy of persuading Crispus, the ruler of their Synagogue, to become a Christian and they desired the arm of government to punish him. But Gallio was too wise to be made into a tool by these zealots. He motioned Paul, then about to defend himself, to silence and he threw the case out of court as having nothing to do with the law, there being neither a civil wrong nor any outrage of public morality at stake.

Is it not a great mistake for religious people to look to government for anything else than the maintenance of tolerance to provide an open field for the free working of the Spirit?

THE POINT OF THE STORY

Thou art the man.—II Samuel 12:7.

The prophet Nathan has told David the story of the unjust taking by a rich man of a poor man's one ewe lamb and David has impulsively uttered indignation against such conduct.

But like most good stories, this one had a point, which in this instance was directed at David's unjust dealing with Uriah.

Curious, wasn't it, that the King didn't see himself in the picture until the prophet pointed his accusing phrase right at him: Thou art the man. Of course then he saw it and, being an honest man, confessed and repented. But, unless the prophet had tagged the moral on his story, do you think David would have seen the point?

And is it not so with most of us? We are indignant against the evils of which we read and hear, but we gather ourselves up in a sense of superiority which forbids the moral to come home to us.

There is, in these days, considerable criticism of the art of preaching as a naive and childish procedure with carefully labelled morals dragged in at every opportunity. Perhaps it will be time enough to heed that criticism when men learn how to judge themselves in the light of what they see and hear about other people.

NOT FOR SALE

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.—Isaiah 55: 1.

One of the continually astonishing things about religion as the way of life, is the fact that it is freely offered to all men. There is no monetary price attached to it. Your poverty need not keep you from it, nor will your wealth place it within your reach. It is not for sale at any price. It is the gift of God to his children who, realizing their need, are willing to receive it from him.

In many ways money plays a great part—and a part that ought not to be despised—in all sorts of affairs. You cannot get an advanced education without the leisure which money provides. The services of organized religion are not possible without money. All of which is not to say that either what a University or a Church offers can be bought by money alone, but merely that money is concerned in providing it.

Religion in the personal sense is absolutely free. There is nothing between your Soul and God which requires anything not already potentially in your hands for its removal. Whether you own a county or just the shirt on your back, there is no difference.

Is it not wonderfully encouraging to realize that amid all the differences of condition that separate men, we may all be spiritual equals through God's gracious gift to every man?

APPOINTED FOR SALVATION

For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.—I Thessalonians 5:9.

It is not always remembered by Christians that the primary business of Christianity is salvation, not judgment. Of course, judgment is the reverse side of salvation as a moral state. But the striking thing about genuine Christianity,—that is, Christianity which is faithful to the life and teaching of Jesus—is that it seeks not the punishment of sinners, but their conversion and salvation; that it has, at least so far as men are concerned, nothing to do with dividing men into totally separated flocks of sheep and goats.

There are, of course, lost sheep in the world,—but they are all sheep. Indeed it is a bold man who will, except in the abstract, classify even the sheep. And perhaps the most sensible procedure is to recognize that we are all lost sheep totally dependent on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

Nor, on the other hand, should we think meanly of ourselves as if we were forgotten or despised of God. Life truly is too much for any of us, especially if we try to live it or understand it all at once. But if we remember that we are appointed unto salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, and then recall to what a diversity of men and women he has made that salvation evident, we will be able to receive with humble and thankful hearts this unspeakable gift of God,

REJECTING SALVATION

O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her own brood under her wings, and ye would not! —Luke 13:34.

One cold, wintry day I was strolling in the woods, looking and listening, when I came upon a band of hardy bluebirds evidently lured by a mild season to remain late in their summer haunts and now caught by a sudden cold snap. How strange they looked in the snow amid the bare trees.

One in particular drew my attention. He would alight on a twig with great fluttering, pause a moment, and almost immediately fly on. Drawing carefully nearer I found the reason. One leg was broken and with the other he could maintain his balance but for a moment in the cold wind. It was a doleful predicament. How soon would the bright blue wings weary and the poor creature, unable to rest, fall a prey to his natural enemies upon the ground?

Until darkness ended the search I followed that bird trying every means I knew to get him in my hands for safety and succour. But his instincts identified me with the enemy death and he fluttered with increasing weariness before me. We could not speak the same language and my good intentions were foiled.

Many people have had similar experiences with the dumb creation. But do we perceive the parallelism in our own relations with God? How often we reject our one hope of salvation because we will not trust God. That refusal is the more terrible by as much as sin is worse than death.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.—I Corinthians 2: 14.

This statement of Paul's, instead of being a theological abstraction with little practical significance, is one of the most important truths for helping us correct the popular errors of today.

For this is an age in which that great form of procedure known as the scientific method has been foolishly exalted into the solution of every question before men. Of course no accredited scientist makes such a claim, but plenty of ignorant people make it for him. And it is all terribly confusing to the untrained thinker.

As a plain matter of fact it ought to be recognized that when you have explained how any particular occurrence takes place you have not by any means explained why it takes place.

Doubtless the scientific method has a valuable service to perform (among other things) in curbing certain absurdities of logic and speculation. But by what right is it used by pseudo-scientists as the sole arbiter in the realm of faith?

Truly men do the honourable method of science a great disservice by making for it a claim totally outside its natural limits.

The world needs poets and theologians today as well as "engineers" of one sort or another. It is the sum of our various contributions, in mutual interaction, that contains the hope of progress.

OPEN SECRETS

There is nothing covered up, that shall not be revealed. —Luke 12: 2.

Jesus is not here talking of a law that will begin to function in a remote future—He is talking of the spiritual law of life under which we live at all times.

What is in the heart is revealed in the life. Concealment is impossible. Sooner or later it will come out. The man who thinks evil will some day do evil—perhaps even when he doesn't want to.

Outward conduct is ultimately controlled by inner state. All the prohibitory laws in the world will not finally prevent the hatred in men's hearts from dragging them into evil conduct. The only cure is to get at the hidden hatred and remove it; or, better still, to give it no resting place in the first place.

One reason why men think that the concealment of any particular sin from their fellowmen permanently prevents its discovery is because they fail to understand the simple law that each sin entails consequences in the perpetrator's life regardless of the world's knowledge of its commission. The danger is not in the possibility that your sin as a specific act will be found out but in the certainty that your sin will find you out and ultimately betray you.

In terms of life there are no secrets.

THE MIRACLE OF THE SEED

Unto what is the Kingdom of God like? . . . It is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his own garden; and it grew, and became a tree; and the birds of the heaven lodged in the branches thereof.—Luke 13: 18-19.

There is a popular delusion abroad today that all really important movements must be launched with a great blaring of trumpets, a magnificant supply of material equipment, and especially with a generous provision of capital. Everything must start big in order to get attention and make a success.

Are we not starting at the wrong end—at least as concerns spiritual movements?

The first thing is not the tree but the seed. The first requirement is not a great organization but the spiritual idea. The Church of Christ does not advance by concentration on statistical increases. It advances by the industrious planting and cultivation of the seed.

No; I am not one who neglects the demands of achievement; but I am one who has grown very weary of the delusion of big beginnings. The worldly way of securing popular attention through spectacular beginnings is not the correct way for spiritual works. There is many a small church, unnoticed by the world, which is alive with spiritual growth. There is many a Christian, unknown to fame, who carries in himself the promise of great growth and fruitage. Small beginnings are the right beginnings. But let us be sure that we begin with the living seed, and not a lifeless grain of sand.

THE WRONG KIND OF SEEKING

They shall run to and fro to seek the word of Jehovah, and shall not find it.—Amos 8: 12.

I do not think that anyone can reasonably call our age an irreligious age. It must be evident to every man who observes his fellowmen with sympathy that people today are very conscious of their need of God. You may see the evidence of that fact notably in the modern poetry and in that rather formless and chaotic thing known as the Youth movement, and in the prolific birth of new cults.

One is of course prepared to find that the boundaries of thought, as well as the boundaries of nations, are changed after the cataclysm of a great war. Nor is one surprised to note a certain amount of surface instability and insecurity in an age when inventions and discoveries follow each other with bewildering rapidity.

And yet even those who find themselves profoundly sympathetic with the spirit of this age must often be seriously troubled by the unbalanced thought and conduct of many people. If anything seems new, they follow it with an avidity that argues lack of all reflection. They act with an impatience that plunges them into unconsidered and frequently foolish deeds.

It will not do to feel the need of God and set off in a wild chase to capture Him. It is also required that we steady down to the spiritual depths in which alone He reveals himself to men.

REVERENCING PERSONALITY

We wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man.—II Corinthians 7: 2.

Of course we all reverence personality in ourselves.

But it is a real spiritual grace to exercise the same regard for our fellowmen. And it is especially difficult for a man who has a great purpose to carry through to bear in mind that he ought to accomplish it with the aid of men rather than over their opposition.

Most men will agree in conversation that spiritual purposes are achieved only through recognition of the rights of personality, but when we get to work on any particular plan the temptation to fall back on force and take any advantage we can is almost irresistible.

One of the great qualities in Paul was his steadfast regard for personality even when it meant delays and hindrances in his own work. He took no advantage of anybody.

How humbly he used his learned mind to explain and propound the truth to the young Church!

How carefully he avoided demanding their financial contributions, and offered them opportunities to express their generosity!

He did not even take advantage of them by sending some one else as his agent to do what he himself might shrink from doing—which is the method of some who desire to rule but are personally timid.

It is a fine record—all the more noteworthy because it was accompanied by great zeal and large accomplishment.

PRAISE FOR THE LIVING

Woe unto you! for ye build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. So ye are witnesses and consent unto the works of your fathers; for they killed them, and ye build their tombs.—Luke 11:47-48.

There is an old maxim to the effect that only good should be spoken of the dead. It is a noble half-truth and ought to be considered by those who are inclined to injure the good names of people whose voices are stilled in death. But this business of pronouncing indiscriminate eulogy on any man just because he is dead, is nothing but rank sentimentalism. You cannot praise a man by exalting qualities which he never had, even by attributing them to him. That is idol worship and of course lacks reality.

But the most serious error in our judgment of other men is probably not too great generosity to them after death, even though much of our praise be inaccurate. Rather it is our distortion of the counsel to speak only good of the dead, to the popular dictum that no credit should be given to the living. That is the reason why so many eulogies are sickeningly fulsome. It looks as if we could only see the living man as a potential, if not an actual, rival, and dared therefore give him no credit. When dead, he may be praised in speech and monument, since death has ended any possible competition.

Why should generous praise wait for death? Why can we not introduce the element of eternity into our judgment of living men so that greatness may be recognized and encouraged before it takes its difficult journey into the valley of the shadow?

SENSATIONALISM

The devil . . . set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saith . . . If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee.—Matthew 4: 5, 6.

There is all the difference in the world between the legitimate endeavour to attract attention to one's work and the illegitimate attempt to win the favour of the crowd. One is publicity, the other is sensationalism. There is a great distinction, for example, between the ways of advertising a circus and a church—although many church people do not recognize it.

Nothing is gained by attracting attention to any activity or person except by methods inherently compatible with the regular conduct of that activity or person.

Jesus met that issue right at the beginning of his ministry. He determined that nothing should deflect him from his chosen purpose which by its very nature debarred the use of merely sensational methods. The fact that his miracles of healing drew public attention to him was purely an accident. His leaping from the pinnacle of the temple would have been a play to the gallery with no relation to his mission. Therefore he refused it.

The trouble with sensationalism is that it defeats the purpose of all serious projects. And besides it argues something wrong in its practisers. As John La Farge once wrote of a certain school of eccentric and unskilled painters: "They are driven to do something to attract attention, even their own attention."

ARE YOU A STUMBLING-BLOCK?

Let us not therefore judge one another any more; but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling.—Romans 14: 13.

We are commonly inclined to look upon temptation as something that affects us and forget the vital fact that we may ourselves be stumbling-blocks to other people.

Comparatively speaking there are few men mean enough to set out deliberately and maliciously to throw temptation in their neighbour's way with a view to his destruction. There are some such and they must be handled with vigour and skill as social menaces to the community. Every decent city or village government must fight organized and commercialized temptation.

But I wish to speak rather of those who are unconscious or at least unpurposeful tempters of others, persons who live their lives oblivious to the fact that they are surrounded by people at different stages of moral development and who thus unintentionally become real tempters of others.

Of course the world cannot be run for the benefit of the weak brother; but is not something due to him just because he is weak? And oftentimes his weakness is only the immaturity of youth.

Surely, as Christians, it is incumbent upon us to note the effect of our manner of life on those about us and to see to it that it is not a source of temptation.

What will it profit us to assert our own personal rights and then discover that we have contributed to the crippling of our brother for whom Christ died?

THE BASIS FOR HUMAN JUDGMENTS

By their fruits ye shall know them.—Matthew 7: 20.

The one test that Jesus approved by which men may justly judge one another is the practical test of fruit-bearing,—not merely that faith should bear fruit in terms of character and conduct but that there should be in that fruit the seed of further fruit.

Indeed what other just test can there be in a practical world like this? Are you and I qualified to judge the unseen motives of men's hearts? Put it the other way round: We know that they are not qualified to judge our motives.

You see religion is always in the profoundest sense a practical affair. Recall the story of the blind man that Jesus restored to sight. The Pharisees tried to overawe the poor fellow with their authoritative declaration that Jesus was a sinner. But he refused to be entangled in their arguments. "One thing I know," he announced with admirable perseverance in face of their heckling, "that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Of course that declaration was unanswerable. He made their pompous pronouncements look silly by sticking stubbornly to the practical issue.

Surely in those natural judgments that life compels us to pass on one another we ought to proceed on the basis of Jesus' test. When men claim divine sanction for contradictory positions let us forget their claims and examine their fruits.

And let us not neglect to make sure that our own religion will stand up under this searching test.

THINGS

Having food and covering we shall be therewith content.—I Timothy 6: 8.

Anyone who has had the responsibility of conducting a party of people on a journey knows the insufferable anxiety occasioned by the superfluous baggage that all inexperienced as well as a few old but obstinate travellers bring. Unless a strong authority is exerted right at the beginning, the trip, for one person at least, will be occupied with finding, transporting and assembling trunks, valises and packages. It is a thankless and at last a useless service.

But it is much more serious when we try to live our whole lives cumbered with superfluous things. And how many people are either doing it or trying to do it! Sometimes it seems as if the inability to buy—and not always that!—is the only stop to the amount of things people desire to own and cart about with them. We clutter ourselves up with possessions until we can hardly turn around amid the pile.

Up to a certain point, of course, the owning of things is a means of securing liberty. If you lack a suit of clothes you are hindered from unobtrusive public appearance. But there is a point at which the increase of possessions is only a burden.

It is not just to set the danger line for others by comparison with yourself, for one man may need things which to another are superfluous. But you will do well to be on guard against the domination of material things which is the peculiar peril of an age of prosperity.

THE SIN OF DOING NOTHING

Inasmuch as ye did it not.—Matthew 25 : 45.

One of the most persistent errors of religious thinking is the idea that goodness consists chiefly in not doing certain things. The negative aspect is emphasized out of all proportion.

Perhaps the prevalence of this error dates from our childhood when our rightly exasperated parents told us to " sit on that chair, and be good "—which we promptly interpreted as an order to do nothing.

However that may be, the error persists. When the minister calls, he is informed with commendable purpose but poor judgment, " My husband has no interest in the Church, but he is a good man ; he never harms anybody."

And most of us content ourselves with the reflection that we have not been guilty of this or that particular sin.

We quite forget that Jesus' chief condemnation was reserved for those who neglected to perform the acts for which love calls. The rich man who neglected the beggar at his gate is pictured in hell. The man who neglected to use his talent is marked as a failure. The people of whom He could say, " Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren," are condemned to punishment. Not one of these people had been guilty of anything except doing nothing.

Evidently in Jesus' teaching the most blameworthy sins were sins of omission.

If we are to be truly His disciples do we not need a radical revision in our conception of sin?

OTHER PEOPLE'S TROUBLES

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.—Hebrews 13:3.

The final witness to love is the willingness to share another's suffering. You may see that in the derivation of our word "sympathy" which at first meant to suffer with another, though it has since been enlarged to indicate the sharing of another's feelings of whatever kind they may be.

What better proof of love than that?

The worldly man says, "I have troubles enough of my own. Why should I be concerned with yours?"

But the Christian learns from Jesus that his object should not be to build a fortress for himself against a sea of troubles, but to share his brother's woes, not to flee to some illusion of happy islands, but to cast in his lot with his fellowmen and work with them for the well-being, the peace, the salvation of all men.

No one who has himself been through deep waters can doubt what it means to have a friend stand by sharing without reserve in a trial or sorrow, whatever it may be. To come through alone is a desperate chance. To come through accompanied by a voluntary companion is a gallant hope.

Surely it is a truth which finds its final vindication in Jesus Christ himself who entered into our temptations and burdens.

Surely as his disciples we ought to reflect in our conduct toward one another's troubles something of the spirit of him who hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

OTHER PEOPLE'S SINS

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;
And sinners shall be converted unto thee.
—Psalm 51:13.

Most of us are pretty shrewd observers of other peoples' sins and fairly voluble in our denunciation of them. The conventional among us are usually willing to confess our own sins (in the abstract) and prompt to condemn other people's sins (in the concrete). But we all hesitate to risk incurring the nickname which was given to Jesus, "a friend of publicans and sinners."

And yet, as has been said repeatedly and with considerable eloquence, our business as Christians is to hate the sin and love the sinner.

It is a difficult thing to do, perhaps as hard as anything in the world. It means that we must lay aside the worldly conception of respectability. It means that we must forego the childish pleasure of setting off our supposed virtues against the background of other people's sins painted in darkest colours. It means not only that we shall enter the lists against our own sins, but that we shall accept the privilege of helping others to turn from their sins.

To a real disciple of Jesus Christ other men's sins are not just excuses for uttering condemnations (no matter how true they may be). They are invitations to open the way to God's salvation so that the sinner may be taught and converted and saved.

OTHER PEOPLE'S HAPPINESS

The friend of the bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.—John 3:29.

It is a sad thing when a man cannot rejoice in another man's happiness without dragging in personal comparisons. How many opportunities for genuine gladness are let slip because we look on the other man's happiness only to exclaim, "Alas! everybody is happy except myself"—quite forgetting that we also may rejoice in his happiness.

Surely the man who limits his rejoicing to good fortune befalling himself cuts himself needlessly off from a great deal of the good cheer of life.

And what does he gain by his selfish action? Nothing, except loneliness. Nothing, except the unnecessary sense of being without a friend because he is not friendly himself.

There are few qualities that more endear a man to his fellowmen than the ability to rejoice wholeheartedly in their happiness. Who is so welcome at any time as he who can cast aside his own anxieties and rejoice in his neighbour's good fortune?

That is one of the things that lends grace and beauty to a wedding party. It is a company of people gathered to rejoice in the happiness which is not personally their own.

If you really want to know people and love them you must rejoice with them. It is not a duty so much as a privilege. For it means that your heart is in the right place and functioning properly.

OTHER PEOPLE'S VIRTUES

He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear.—Matthew 3:11.

Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.—Matthew 11:11.

A fundamental part of the right relationship of the individual soul to God is the relationship that each man sustains to his fellowmen. This is clearly emphasized everywhere in the New Testament. Love of God and of one's neighbour are two parts of one commandment. Divine forgiveness is inseparably connected with forgiveness among men.

Perhaps one of the most difficult places in which to maintain a right relationship with other men is in connection with their virtues.

Like all sins envy is self-destructive. It may offer temporary advantage but in the end it brings disaster. Nothing is gained by failing to observe and give full credit to another's virtues. Envy made Cain a murderer, and revealed the pettiness of the elder Brother who overlooked his prodigal brother's repentance and saw only his sin.

How beautiful by contrast was the mutual recognition of virtues by John the Baptist and Jesus. Did either one suffer injury from generous and gracious words and conduct toward the other?

Only small men withhold full credit to the greatness and goodness of other men.

It is so easy to assume that other men's virtues are insignificant or even non-existent because we think that this attitude exalts ourselves.

THE FAD OF SUSPENDED JUDGMENT

How long go ye limping between the two sides?—I Kings 18:21.

One may justly say that suspended judgment is become a fad of our day. Lots of people are going around saying about almost every issue: Well, it all depends on the point-of-view; there is much to be said on both sides.

Now, God forbid that I should even seem to assume that all issues are clear, or should even seem to condemn anybody who is seriously weighing evidence and seeking to come to a conclusion on any subject and in the meantime holding his decision in abeyance.

But our trouble is not with honest and serious-minded doubters. Our trouble is with this fad of suspended judgment promoted by our influential but crass-minded and flippant sophists.

One of the easiest ways in the world to get a popular reputation for wisdom today is to talk on both sides of all questions and come to no conclusions.

Words, words, words,—and not a flash of discrimination, evaluation, judgment among them!

The system is too easy to have power to reach the truth. By it, tolerance is reduced to indifference, and men go limping along under the delusion that they are broad-minded, when, in reality, they are only indecisive.

If you care to know what my experience of this fad indicates it is that the basis of most of it is mental and moral laziness.

All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes.—Matthew 13: 34.

The parables of Jesus are not allegories.

An allegory is an unreal story meant to convey a lesson,—which it usually fails to do because it is unreal. A virtue, like Purity, or a vice, like Avarice, is dressed up in man's or woman's clothes and sent through a series of adventures.

These do not interest or instruct us because things do not happen that way. Virtues and vices have to be embodied before they can be clothed; and they are never single, but always mixed.

But a parable is a brief tale of real things and persons, carrying along with it (or beside it as the Greek name implies) a deeper meaning. It suggests a hidden picture to the mind's eye. It whispers a message to the inward ear.

Such are the parables of Jesus, stories of things that have occurred, or may have happened a hundred times, but told with a significance that goes beyond the mere tale.

Why did Jesus prefer this method of speaking to the multitudes so much that, as the record says, "without a parable spake he nothing unto them?"

We do not know all the reasons. But two suggest themselves.

First, he wished to catch their attention. Pictures attract children. Second, he wished to make them think.

Thoughtlessness is the peril of the multitude. Unless you will think, neither reading nor listening will help you.

MEETING TEMPTATION

Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.—James 1: 2-4.

It seems a hard saying to call on men to rejoice when they fall into temptations. How can that be? How can we be glad over such bitter experiences?

In the first place notice that we are not urged to seek temptation. Jesus has taught us to pray: Lead us not into temptation. And the more a man knows of life the more earnestly does he utter that petition.

Our call is not to seek temptation but to rejoice when we fall into it: that is to meet it with a joyful spirit—which is quite another thing from seeking it.

And the reason why we should meet temptation joyfully is because when we meet it in that spirit we acknowledge that it is a testing by means of which we may grow, that our business is victory over it, and that God's purpose for us is increasing strength through trial.

To seek out temptation self-confidently, as youth is inclined to do; or to meet it hopelessly, as is the fashion of age, are both fundemental errors that lead to many disasters.

Our business is to meet temptation, when it comes, with joy.

"Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master, and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestaled in triumph."

SHOWING-OFF

Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them.—Matthew 6: 1.

It is not only children who are guilty of the sin of showing-off. Some of us get the habit young and retain it all our lives.

We are terribly anxious lest our merits be overlooked. How humiliating to see others receive the plaudits of the crowd while we are unnoticed.

Any one who has responsibility for the business affairs of a Church or any philanthropic enterprise is familiar with this common human weakness. How we love to lead off the subscription list. How we love to be known as generous givers and first citizens! Naturally publicity in such matters has its value for its just influence on others. But how often the spiritual value of gifts is destroyed because they are given to be seen of men.

After all showing-off may build up a reputation, but it destroys the very foundation of genuine righteousness.

Until we learn to do things from the sheer joy of doing them we may establish a reputation but we shall never build a character.

And sooner or later, like the smart boy showing-off to the admiringly giggling little girls, we shall stub our toe and sprawl undignifiedly amid the unsympathetic laughter of an amused world.

ON BEING SICK

Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, . . . for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.— II Corinthians 12: 10.

Being unable to get rid of poor health, the Apostle Paul even took pleasure in his weakness because through it the power of Christ rested upon him. It is lofty doctrine but it has found noble justification in the lives of many afflicted people who have followed Paul's bold leading.

Would that it were honoured by all people who carry the burden of ill-health! What a difference this would make to sympathetic families and friends, doctors and ministers! For there is no tyranny like the tyranny of exacting and querulous sick people. Verily they enjoy bad health, not because through it the sufficient power of God may rest upon them, but because they find in it an excuse for domineering over those whom they facilely assume have no troubles of their own.

You can see humble and kindly persons wince under the complaints of these despots. You can see sympathetic natures wilting and shrivelling beneath the blazing rays of their egotism.

Every one within reach is " shanghaied " for a listener to troubles which have long been exalted into justifications for self-love. And the net result is a meaningless addition to the sorrows of the world.

There is a right and a wrong way of taking pleasure in our weaknesses. Do we make ourselves a nuisance or an inspiration?

THE ARISTOCRACY OF SERVICE

Jesus knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and goeth unto God . . . began to wash the disciples' feet.—John 13:3-5.

Every society has its aristocracy. Originally the word meant government by the best citizens. And surely no one could quarrel with that ideal. But this fine word has been abused until the emphasis has shifted from the idea of obligation to the idea of privilege.

The story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet sets before us the true ideal of aristocracy—the ideal of service, *Noblesse oblige.*

See how clearly these ideas of aristocracy and service are associated in the record. Jesus' knowledge of his origin from God, of his destiny into God, of the power that God had put in his hands, led him to wash the disciples' feet. What could be plainer? Here are the elements which are the very essence of aristocracy: Noble origin and destiny combined with power. And in the hands of Jesus these qualifications lead directly to service.

Here is the true aristocracy which is not exclusive but inclusive for all who will exercise its obligations. For to all men belong a common origin and destiny—God, and to all is given some measure of power under God.

Is not this the genuine conception of aristocracy? Not a privileged class leaning back on its superior power over others; but a royal band consciously devoting its talents to the public welfare.

SPURIOUS SIMPLICITY

Wherein are some things hard to be understood.—II Peter 3: 16.

There is a great longing today for simplicity especially in thought and speech. Most of us are no longer influenced by bombastic oratory or rhetoric. We want the simple truth. And this is a good sign of our times. But like all virtues it easily degenerates into a vice. There is a tendency abroad to reduce thought to spurious simplicity. Particularly dangerous is this in the realm of religion. Some men are describing Christianity as a simple, obvious, natural, easy thing. They say: All you have to do is to drop theology and practice the sermon on the mount!

Truly to live out the sermon on the mount is the fine flower of religion. But is that the whole of it? Is there no root from which the flower blossoms forth?

Religion is not just conduct. It is motive. It is communion with God. Why should I treat man as my brother unless God is our Father? And even suppose I want to do it, how can I, unless I have laid hold of divine power?

To simplify things especially in our all too confused age is important. But it is possible to go beyond the truth in the process.

To preach ethics apart from the dynamic of faith may be easy but it is not effective.

For the soul of man is a deep mystery and the will of man is not easily won to righteousness.

Singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.—Ephesians 5: 19.

How much nearer Christians are in their hymns than they are in their doctrinal creeds!

All agree in using the Psalms as a common treasury of song. "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want," was written by a Jew, and translated by a Presbyterian.

"Jerusalem, the golden," and "There's a wideness in God's mercy," were written by Catholics. "Sun of my soul," and "Abide with me," were written by Anglicans. "Nearer my God to Thee," by a Unitarian; "Dear Lord and Father of mankind," by a Quaker; "O little town of Bethlehem," by an American Episcopalian; "My faith looks up to Thee," by a Congregationalist; "Blest be the tie that binds," by a Baptist; "I heard the voice of Jesus say," by a Presbyterian; and "Jesus, lover of my soul," by a Methodist.

But who of us would stop to hold a theological examination on the authors before we join in these dear and holy songs?

The melody in our heart is too clear and simple to be troubled by controversies. The joy of the Holy Spirit lifts us nearer to that Heaven where, I hope and believe, we shall all see our Lord as He is and be changed into His likeness.

GOOD THINGS MISPLACED

As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest so honour is not seemly for a fool.—Proverbs 26: 1.

Snow in winter is a good thing; but not in summer. Rain is necessary, a "useful trouble," in the spring-time when the crops are growing; but not in autumn when they are ripe and ready for the harvest. Honour is a good thing when it is well-earned and wisely worn; but not when it comes to those who have not deserved it and know not how to use it.

Yet in the course of nature, and of human nature, these misplacements of things in themselves good sometimes occur. A May frost blackens the orchard. An August flood ruins the hay; fools are set high in reputation and power.

A loud-mouthed ignoramus is hailed as a great orator; a careless, lazy, cock-eyed painter is praised as a wonderful artist; a shallow and impudent writer is exalted as a genius; a narrow, selfish, and malignant politician is honoured as a statesman; and a solemn, silly propagandist of dead theories is called a sage.

This is vexatious, of course,—summer snow and harvest rain! But what can we do about it? Not very much; we have to take it as it comes; fretting over it will do no good.

After all, these displacements are not permanent. They will pass away like dead leaves. Meantime we must try to keep our judgment sane and serene; to do our own task as well as we can; and to make up for refusing to honour eminent fools, by giving the more honour to good, quiet workmen in every field.

SMALL THINGS

Behold the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, are yet turned about by a very small rudder.—James 3:4.

Size is not always an indication of importance. We all stop to look at a big man walking in a crowd. But he is not always superior to his less noticeable companions. The giant Goliath was no doubt a splendid figure on the field of battle; but he was no match for the ruddy stripling David.

It is all very interesting to see the tallest building in the world, or the largest ship, or the biggest city. But let us not forget that size apart from other qualifications is no indication of real superiority.

There are small things which wield a mighty influence.

A rudder is a small thing compared to the ship which it steers. But who wants to be on a rudderless ship?

Your home may be very small and humble, but would you exchange it and all that it means for a residence in the biggest hotel in the world?

A man may be a very small creature, but would you rather be an elephant or the man who controls him?

Words are little things, but what tremendous power for good or evil they may exert!

Let us beware lest we be deceived by mere bulk and miss the secret of spiritual power.

HALF-BAKED

Ephraim is a cake not turned.—Hosea 7:8.

No one who has had the disagreeable experience of having to subsist on badly baked bread is likely to forget it. If it be your own cooking you may put up with it for a while out of pride, but soon or late, under the leadership of an insulted stomach the rebellion will break forth.

The metaphor is equally true in the realm of human conduct and thought. Nothing is more provocative of revolt among the neighbours than a half-baked fellow from whom stream forth rash and ill-considered actions and unformed and lop-sided opinions. He is a constant source of social indigestion to those around him. And what a sorry figure he cuts,—scorched on one side, sticky and pasty on the other, an unpalatable and unnourishing morsel!

Of course even a good loaf goes through a time when it is only half-baked. But it is not at that moment offered for food.

Experiments are assuredly necessary as a means of discovering further truth and disclosing ancient error. But when they concern human beings they ought to be conducted with due regard for human values.

The heat of much thought ought to pass through all sides of an idea before it is issued in speech or action. At least it would prevent a lot of unnecessary and painful indigestion.

A LESSON FOR GROWN-UPS

He called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them.—Matthew 18: 2.

The output of preaching and teaching to children to prepare them for becoming men and women is enormous. And it is well that this should be so. It would be still better if that teaching and preaching should be more closely directed to giving them a true understanding of themselves and a clearer view of the moral opportunities and obligations of human life.

But there is another side to this question which has been almost totally neglected except by those who are real lovers of the teachings of Jesus: that is, emphasis on the need of men and women to become little children.

The truth is, spiritual maturity is a double process: that of growing up in experience and knowledge, and of becoming young again in spirit.

Most of us seem to lack this combination of qualities. It is comparatively easy to become sophisticated and cynical; but very exacting to attain to the wisdom revealed unto babes.

Are you perhaps getting just a little hard and bitter? —maybe even justifiably so from the worldly view-point?

Establish a real personal interest in some child—your own child will do as well as any other—and let him or her reveal to you how to turn and become as a little child.

Then you will be really grown up.

IF WINTER COMES

Summer and winter . . . shall not cease.—Genesis 8:22.

The ontological argument for the existence of God has not much force nowadays, because metaphysics are out of fashion. The teleogical argument has lost ground, because people have misunderstood the teachings of evolution. But the cosmological argument has gained ground, because science has taught us that a universe of law and order must be the creation of a Sovereign Reason and Will,—that is God.

Winter strips the foliage off the trees, withers the flowers, binds the streams with icy fetters. But this does not mean destruction. It means only withdrawal for renewal.

The buds on the leafless trees are promises. The hopes in disappointed hearts are prophecies. How were they planted, save by the Lord of Life?

In the midst of winter the assurance of coming spring is one of the pillars of the universe. In the presence of death the faith of immortality is the mainstay of mankind.

THE GOSPEL IS POWER

I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation.—Romans 1 : 16.

The world is full of impotent idealisms. There is a great deal more appreciation of beauty, truth and goodness than there is embodiment of them in life.

Bacon declared that knowledge is power. But this can never be the whole truth—as any learned man will tell you. Large numbers of men know what is good, and are yet utterly unable to practise it. That is one of the great mysteries of life, that we should know the highest and yet choose for ourselves what is low.

Certainly ignorance is one of the great evils that beset men, but it is far from being the only evil. The leading forth of the mind among noble thoughts is a great service to mankind, but it is not the only thing needed. The will and the heart must be affected even more directly than by education in this narrower sense. There must be religion with education—otherwise education is impotent. We must be saved as well as illuminated.

And here is where the Gospel comes in. "It is the power of God unto salvation." Along with the truth—which is one, wherever and however apprehended—we require a power sufficient to enable us not only to recognize but to embody the truth.

The Gospel is the only dynamic capable of transforming men from incompetent dreamers into sons of God.

GOD'S LAW AMONG BIRDS AND MEN

Yea the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the law of Jehovah.—Jeremiah 8:7.

Nothing is more impressive than to observe the regularity of nature. How evenly (with minor and occasional variations) the seasons come round. For one who knows how to watch them, the birds return each spring with a precision that is marvellous to consider. No one has ever adequately explained the astonishing phenomenon of migration, though many have observed it. The prophet Jeremiah in the Seventh Century B. C. makes one of the earliest literary references to it. He perceives that the birds come obediently to some great law of their being; and with their obedience he contrasts the disregard of his fellow countrymen for the law of God which ought to be equally written in their nature. Just as the birds return in accord with the mysterious summons of natural law, so ought men to move with precision and unanimity according to the law of God.

Why is it that we will insist on having our own way and asserting the right of each moral being to break the law of God? What can be the outcome of such conduct but injury to ourselves and others? What chaos it would introduce into the delicate balance of nature if the doves suddenly rebelled against their call to migration! And what chaos we are continually introducing into the delicate adjustments of the spiritual realm by the egotistic setting up of our puny plans against the immutable and sovereign law of God!

REMEMBERED ACHIEVEMENT

David said, There is none like that; give it me.—I Samuel 21:9.

David was hard beset fleeing from the wrath of Saul, weaponless and alone, when he came to Nob and sought food of Ahimelech the priest. Having obtained the food, his next thought was for a weapon lest he be taken defenseless by his enemies.

"Is there not here under thy hand spear or sword?" he inquired. And Ahimelech took down the sword of Goliath, with which David on a famous former day had given the *coup de grâce* to his country's enemy.

You can feel the thrill in David's response as he reached out and took the sword: "There is none like that; give it me." And you know instinctively that the joy in his heart as his fingers closed around the hilt, had nothing to do with the quality of the steel or the balance of that mighty weapon.

What lifted up David's dejected heart and made him once more a bold, courageous man, was the revived memory of that great exploit which, under God's grace, he had performed.

Even so may every man hope to find encouragement for himself in future trials, provided he meets today with fearless courage the challenge of the present moment.

GRATITUDE AND ITS EXPRESSION

Were not the ten cleansed? but where are the nine? —Luke 17:17.

It is a question full of pathos. Ten lepers who had besought Jesus' mercy had been cleansed, but only one—and he a Samaritan—had returned to give thanks.

No one knows why the nine failed to re-appear. For I think it must go without saying that they were thankful. Can you imagine a human being who would not rejoice at being rescued out of the power of a dread disease? And yet somehow they failed to express their gratitude.

Frankly I am not one of those who thinks this is just a "notable illustration of the all but universal ingratitude of mankind." I do not observe that men are unthankful though I note that they frequently forget to express the thanks that they feel. We are thoughtless and careless and neglectful. Our feelings are sound, but our expression of them is usually inadequate and sometimes totally overlooked. In our secret hearts we do not take our blessings as a matter of course, but unfortunately we often act as if we did.

Here is a lovely theme for life-long study: How to give suitable expression to the gratitude we feel.

We all need to acquire more skill in directing lips, hands and feet at the bidding of a grateful heart. Otherwise the heart itself may shrivel.

FRUSTRATED GENIUS

Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man who hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!—II Samuel 15:4.

The world always has a full complement of frustrated geniuses

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born."

Absalom was one of them. Ambitious, critical of things as they were, self-confident, he thought that if only he were king all would be well.

Doubtless there were abuses in David's rule, but there was no hope of improvement in the steps Absalom took to supplant his father.

He fawned upon his fellow citizens who were in trouble and made large promises to discontented folks. At the same time he offered a self-revelation that indicated his incapacity for fulfilling the promises.

Absalom was so obsessed with the genius that he thought he recognized in himself that he was blind to the evident genius in his father. Being a man without loyalty or personal restraint, he coveted the rank of king for himself, convinced that there his frustrated genius might be recognized of all. But his abortive rebellion failed because it was founded on jealousy and ambition and lacked the stability of genuine and positive issues of human welfare.

That is the usual experience of those who go about nursing the feeling that they are frustrated geniuses. Life has an exorable way of applying the acid test to their claims.

SENTIMENTALITY

The children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt for nought; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.—Numbers 11:4-5.

Everyone knows there is a world of difference between sentiment and sentimentality. All honest men have sentiments. But your sentimentalist is an affected fellow, vulgar and shallow.

It was perhaps inevitable that after so many years of slavery in Egypt the personal habits of the children of Israel should have become adapted to the conditions under which they lived. And again it was natural that amid the hardships of the wilderness their hearts should exaggerate the material comforts they had experienced in Egypt.

But this maudlin weeping over the memory of the good food eaten in slavery was only rank sentimentality. I cannot help thinking that their tears must have flowed still more copiously as they remembered the leeks and the onions and the garlic. For the moment at least they gave themselves up to irrational feelings and forgot the moral condemnation of slavery which was the ground of God's call to the exodus. So pitiful seemed the lack of leeks, onions and garlic especially when they gazed upon the dry and hard manna, that tears were irresistible.

That is the root of sentimentality: overwrought feelings with sober moral reflection left out.

It looks childish in other people. How do you think it looks in yourself?

GENTLENESS AND GREATNESS

Thy gentleness hath made me great.—Psalm 18: 35.

The strong man has always the tendency to be self-reliant even to the extent of being self-sufficient. He forgets how he got his strength.

And how did he get it?

Surely in one way or another he got it from gentleness, tenderness.

Take a good look at this runner as he races around the cinder-track. What skill and power in those flashing legs and feet! But go back twenty or twenty-five years and observe him swaying unsteadily on wobbling legs and clutching his mother's skirts. Can this runner be the same person as that child? Yes, the same,—made great by gentleness.

Listen to this debater as he marshalls the forces of an overwhelming argument with a skill that sweeps everything before him. Can this be the same person as the child weeping over his alphabet and braced for the desperate assault on twenty-six letters by the patience of an obscure teacher? Yes, the same,—made great by gentleness.

Observe this woman among the sick and wounded. Skilful, tender, steady, she is a tower of strength to the sufferers. Be sure that somewhere gentleness has touched her and brought forth strength.

There can be no greatness, whatever the form it take, without gentleness.

> "The child is father of the man;
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety."

PRAISE YE THE LORD

I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.—Psalm 146:2.

"I wish," said a lovely old lady to me the other day, "I wish that the churches would learn how to praise God. I attend so many doleful services. It does me more good to praise God than anything else I do."

There is wisdom in those simple words—a wisdom needing particular emphasis today.

It is a self-conscious age. The over-conscientious people find themselves so concerned with duty, that they neglect praise. The sceptical folks are so interested in analysing human nature and offering their one-sided interpretations, that they have no inclination for praise.

We all greatly need the self-forgetfulness, the objective frame of mind, that comes with honest praise. There is a fine freedom which can only be experienced by those who rejoice in the nature and governance of God. There is a renewal of spirit that is derived only from blotting out the memory of petty things in an exalted gratitude for major blessings.

Say what you will truthfully about the sorrows and limitations of human life and the insoluble mysteries of the creation, there yet remains the clear call to praise God. For the real origin of religion is not a hopeless wail for help, but the joyful shout of expectant faith.

THE ONE FOUNDATION

Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.—I Corinthians 3: 11.

Nothing is more important than the beginning of an enterprise.

What kind of a fool would you call a builder who commenced his building without first carefully choosing a good foundation? And yet many of us do that very thing with our lives. We start acquiring education and making friends and generally erecting the house of our lives without any regard to whether we are building on swamp or sand or rock. Is it any wonder that the air echoes with the crash of falling lives and that the ground is covered with the wreckage?

First choose your foundation. Begin at the beginning. You can't build a life any more than a house from the roof down. And as the foundation of a secure house is the living rock, so the foundation of human life is the living Christ.

He lived the only completely successful life we know anything about. Sin, pain and death, these perpetual enemies of mankind, were impotent before Him. Like a shining lily in the light of the ages, like the towering castles of man's dreams rises the straight and true and perfect edifice of His life. Reality has only once attained to it; imagination can reach no further.

THE SYMPATHY OF FRIENDS

Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.—Acts 28: 15.

There is no more beautiful incident in the Bible than the account of Paul's arrival at the market of Appius. Buffeted in shipwreck, narrowly escaped from death on land and sea, he comes ashore on his way to Rome, Rome the goal of his ambition. But he comes as a prisoner under guard. Small wonder if he walks despondently. What a contrast to his hopes! Furthermore, he is cut off from knowledge of his beloved Churches in Asia Minor. Would you blame him if he were wrapped in gloom?

But look! What is this? Friendly faces, kindly greetings. A little band of Christians from the Roman Church have come forty-three miles to meet him, "Whom when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage." O lovely gesture of Christian sympathy! They could not release him from bonds, but they could walk beside him on that sorrowful journey and cheer him with word and look.

We all find ourselves at one time or another in sorrows which our friends can do nothing to end but which they may do everything to transform. What experience can be more heartening in a day of trouble than to look up and see the faces and hear the words of loyal friends? Truly there is nothing more lovely in the world than the sympathy of our friends.

THE REVEALING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

Iron sharpeneth iron;
So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.
—Proverbs 27: 17.

In an examination in a Sunday School with which I am connected the question was asked: What is a friend? A little girl of ten years wrote this answer: "A friend is some one who will tell you things that no one else will tell you."

The more I reflect on those words the more am I impressed with the little girl's wisdom. Both by way of personal commendation and condemnation and by way of comment on life a friend will tell you things that no one else will tell you. From a friend you will obtain those gracious, intimate glimpses of life without which it is all a barren waste. For only between friends can such revealing comments pass. Among strangers there is not enough confidence.

But from other things that the little girl wrote in the same examination I am led to understand that she was placing particular emphasis on a friend's ability to help you obtain a true knowledge of yourself. Of course no one can keep friends if he seeks simply to gain a reflection of himself from them. Nevertheless it is true that in friendship we learn more about our friends and about ourselves than is possible in any other way.

Surely life can find no deeper significance than in the gracious glimpses of another soul and in the truthful presentation of yourself that real friendship affords.

FRIENDLY GESTURES

Salute one another
The saints salute you
—Epistles (*passim*).

There are many instances of these friendly gestures in the Epistles of the New Testament. At first reading perhaps the frequent messages to and from Prisca and Aquila and Mary and Timothy and others seem of little significance to us. We may even think they take away from the universal appeal of the Epistles.

But stop for a moment and reflect. What could be more indicative of the Christian spirit than the desire to exchange personal salutations? It shows how deep and true the currents of these Epistles run that with their tremendous themes they yet contain these lovely friendly salutations.

For it is a worthy instinct of human nature, this desire to give and receive a salutation. It has nothing to do with the economic conditions of life; and except for the fact that man is above all else a spiritual being it would be totally futile. But there it is, written into the nature of every man of good will:

The postman passes the time of day as he delivers the mail; the 'bus driver lifts one hand in salute from his wheel as he passes his fellow-driver on the road; the brakeman leans out from his car platform as his train rushes through the station where his friend is employed; the captain pulls the whistle cord in salute as his vessel passes the ship piloted by his friend.

And every once in a while some one with whom we thought we had only a business or professional relation sends us a message on the occasion of some joy or sorrow that reminds us of the breadth and depth of human sympathy.

"GLITTERING GENERALITIES"

All men are liars.—Psalm 116: 11.

No error is easier than that of drawing a greater conclusion than is warranted by the premises with which we start. An isolated instance is enlarged into an inviolable rule of nature. A partial observation is treated as if it were an exhaustive study.

Men make a flying visit to a strange country and come home to discuss the delicate problems of that country with a finality that would be ludicrous if it did not have such serious results.

When we ourselves are ill or in trouble how quickly we assume that the whole world is a gloomy place. We enlarge our own particular feelings and experiences into principles of world-wide significance.

Having had some hard experiences in dealing with several persons we conclude that all human nature (except our own peculiar share of it) is corrupt.

Having been defrauded we make up our minds that all business is dishonest.

Having once known a minister or Church officer who fell publicly before temptation we declare that all religion is hypocrisy.

Many a verdict which we feel quite free to declare whenever we please, if tracked down to its origin is founded on an isolated instance magnified by desire or interest to an invariable law.

The habit of generalizing may be a thought-process needful to dealing with the future, but it ought to be exercised very carefully lest it proclaim us as fools in the eyes of real thinkers.

OBVIOUS SERVICE

It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables.—Acts 6: 2.

The decision to make service the goal of your life is excellent so far as it goes. But it has soon to be translated into terms of action. And then the difficulty begins. For there are as many kinds of service as there are kinds of men in the world.

The easiest thing to do of course is to lay hold of the nearest useful job and do it without regard to your qualifications. There are always plenty of zealous but undiscriminating persons who are interested in securing occupants for the positions for which they are responsible regardless of any human waste it may entail. But the business of a man who has his life to invest is not only to find a useful job, but a job that calls for all his abilities.

It was not pride that made the Apostles unwilling to spend their time serving tables. Doubtless it would have been a great show of humility for them to undertake this worthy and needed service. But they perceived that they were required for other work and they secured the appointment of new men for this service.

Let a man beware lest the popularity of the service idea betray him into undertaking work which bears the obvious service label rather than work that is a higher though less noticeable service.

A BIT OF SENTIMENT

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!—II Samuel 23:15.

In the Cave of Adullam, among his fierce and ragged warriors, the heart of David went back to his boyhood, and he longed for a draught of water from that well where he had often quenched his thirst when he was a shepherd-lad. I do not know that it was especially good water. But he wanted it for old times' sake.

Bethlehem was then in the hands of the Philistines. But three of David's mighty men risked their lives to break into the enemy's stronghold, and bring back the water for which their chief's heart thirsted. When he held the cup in his hand he realized what his friends had dared for him. His heart was satisfied. He could not drink the precious water, but poured it on the ground with prayer as an offering to God.

Sentimentality? No, friend, it was not that. But it was *sentiment,* real and true and deep: the power that makes us love the memories of home and defend them; the power that binds loyal men to a brave leader; the power that lifts human life above the level of a logical machine and makes it a fine adventure.

A man without sentiment is like a tree without sap,—not a tree, but a post.

SHORT-CUTS

He that believeth shall not be in haste.—Isaiah 28: 16.

The habit of taking short-cuts is one that lays strong hold on people who are always in a hurry. We think we shall save time by cutting our corners. Sometimes this is justified. But in our age short-cutting is far more of a careless habit than a reasoned attempt to save time for more valuable purposes.

There are hundreds of illustrations.

Jay-walking in our crowded cities is not done by the men with important business to transact, but by the thoughtless folks.

The true mountaineer is not looking for the shortest and quickest way to the summit. He is looking for the surest way—even if it takes more time.

The man who desires a trained mind is not looking for the easiest way to get a college degree.

In fact everyone that has important business in hand knows that full allowance of time is a necessary element in carrying out his purpose. Nothing really worth while is accomplished in a hurry. It pays to go the full course.

Perhaps if we all realized and practised this there would be less hectic and unbalanced short-cutting, fewer half-baked college degrees, and more of that patience and poise that mark the man who knows that time is needed to get anywhere worth going.

In matters of religion this truth is of vital import. The man who believes in God is not anxious about cutting corners because he is engaged in tasks

"Too great for haste, too high for rivalry."

A STEP FORWARD

After the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets. —Acts 24: 14.

There is a line of continuity with the past that must be maintained, if any progress is to be rendered possible. Only the man who respects the past is able to take a step forward, because he alone is qualified to know not only what is feasible but to judge what will be beneficial.

And yet the fact must be plain to all lovers of mankind that what has been in the past ought by no means to be the sole determining factor in any situation. There come times in history when a change from what has preceded is necessary. Such are times of crisis, no doubt; but it will not do to shut our eyes to their existence, nor to try to meet them with the usual means of ordinary times.

The ground-gains of progress may come by imperceptible degrees, but the consolidation of those gains for the benefit of all the people must often seem the result of sudden " breaks " with the past. And so they are, for the vast majority of people. There are only a few who are deep enough in thought at any time of crisis, to perceive that the cataclysm is but the next imperceptible degree of advance in a chain of events.

FORMS THAT FALSIFY

Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition.—Matthew 15:6.

The great peril which all moral truth faces is lest the form in which it appears become first the cell in which it is imprisoned, and finally the coffin in which it is buried. Forms and institutions are vital to the manifestation of truth in such a world as this; but there is continual danger lest the body be taken as identical with the spirit.

A man's clothes and house are important to him so long as he is alive. But of what value are they if he be dead?

Just so is it with moral truth. What is the use of concerning ourselves with forms and traditions and conventions and institutions in which to array truth, if these things cut off the vital breath of life? And if, in seeking to devise clothing and a dwelling-place for truth, we produce sumptuous raiment and a splendid palace as a setting, but smother the life out of truth, of what profit is it? Who will be instructed by a corpse?

It was not only some of the ancient Pharisees who made this error. It is a common error in every age.

The one safeguard lies in remembering that forms and institutions, like clothes and houses, are only of value for contributing to the life of the spirit.

POWER OF FORGIVENESS

There is forgiveness with Thee,
That Thou mayest be feared.

—Psalm 130: 4.

No experience is more terrible than that of being forgiven. There is no one we hate more than the man we have wronged. But if he insists on forgiving us we are overwhelmed with confusion. A young Christian working man told me that he lost a valued tool from his tool kit and recognized it later in the kit of his fellow workman. Being the only Christian at work in the room he felt it incumbent upon him to show forgiveness. So he went to the thief and said, " I see you have one of my tools, but you can keep it if you need it." Then he went on with his work and put the incident out of his mind. During the next two weeks the thief three times tried to give the value of the tool to its rightful owner—once by offering to give him something else of equal value, again by offering his services between hours, and again by slipping money into his coat pocket. The incident closed with a lasting friendship between the two men because, said the thief, " I couldn't stand being forgiven."

Even more irresistible is God's forgiveness toward us. How puny and vain are our struggles against it. " God commendeth his own love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Am I my brother's keeper?—Genesis 4: 9.

When Cain had murdered Abel and heard God asking, "Where is Abel thy brother?" he must have known that God was not asking for information. And yet he chose to answer with the sulky response, "I know not," and then added the peevish defense, "Am I my brother's keeper?"—must I be able at all times to account for where my brother is and what he is doing?

The defense was absurd, and Cain must have realized it even while he spoke. Of course Cain was not responsible for Abel's conduct and whereabouts! But he was responsible for what he had done to Abel. And this was what God was asking about. Why is not Abel free and living like yourself?

No one can be held accountable in the final sense for what other people do. That would be a violation of the rights of personality. But we are responsible for what we do to others, directly and indirectly. To deny this is to run in the face of social responsibility which is just as real as individual rights.

No, Cain was not his brother's keeper; but, as has often been pointed out, he ought to have been his brother's brother.

CASE-WORK

If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?—James 2: 15-16.

Theory and practice are brought together in the rather unattractive but important word " Case-work," from the Social Worker's vocabulary. It is one thing to work out a theory—especially a theory about human life—and it is quite another thing to deal with the concrete cases which life presents. I would not utter a word in disparagement of the teaching of theories in classroom and study. Theories ought to be the product of accumulated experience boiled down to a residuum of wisdom.

Unfortunately there is too often in college, seminary, church and other institutions, a tendency to formulate theories in almost total dissociation from facts. For example, that ancient unreality, the economic man, has certainly never existed on land or sea. Or, again, who could conceive in real life such a stilted caricature as is often held up before us as the Christian ideal?

This business of analysing life into its constituent parts and then theorizing about each part as if it were in a vacuum, leads inevitably to ridiculous conclusions. The only safeguard lies in disciplining the generalizing tendency of the mind by continual dealing with concrete instances.

If you think that faith is everything, observe its inadequacy as you deal with a brother or sister naked and in lack of daily food.

SPIRITUAL INDEBTEDNESS

Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?—I Corinthians 4: 7.

It is a common failing (especially among men) to assume that all we have and are is in some mysterious way to be directly traced to our own private virtues. Most men hate to recognize their indebtedness to any one else, and very few acknowledge it. And yet to recognize and acknowledge indebtedness is one of the plainest marks of genuine religion.

The trouble is we like to think of the world as a battlefield in which we go forth to snatch achievement and fame for ourselves. As a matter of fact, it is much more nearly a co-operative society in which pooled effort provides the opportunity which genius seizes when it comes.

How many great men would there be if you took away the little red schoolhouses and the nameless teachers?

How many unknown wives and mothers find their monuments in careers too often regarded as individual achievements?

And would it not be better for us all if we generously acknowledged our indebtedness for what we have and are to all sorts and conditions of people?

Paul showed himself a truly great man, for he knew that Life itself is the best Teacher, and that there is no man who cannot instruct some one else.

For the only career that any man produces by his own unaided efforts is that of the perfect fool.

The sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light.—Luke 16:8.

It's all very nice to associate prosperity with honesty, but we all know that this association is accidental and no law.

To disregard all scruples is easily the surest way of getting immediate results. The wicked has an enormous temporary advantage over the man who will not act outside his principles. You may know what course the righteous man will take if you know a moral principle when you see one. But you cannot plan to meet the evil man's schemes because you can never be sure which way his advantage lies. For it is his regular procedure to hide his trail beneath many false clues.

The rich man whose dishonest steward used his lost job to provide himself with new friends was doubtless not pleased at discovering the fact. But he recognized the unrighteous steward's personal astuteness. For the moment he had done well for himself. That's where evil is strong.

But suppose the story went further. Can you not see trouble inevitably gathering for the steward and even for his innocent descendants and relatives?

For their own generation the sons of the world are wiser than the sons of the light. But for the eternity of the soul or even the duration of humanity they are inexpressibly stupid.

ALERTNESS WITH DEPENDENCE

Watch and pray.—Matthew 26: 41.

Commonly we obey only one-half of this commandment. But its strength lies in the interplay of the two parts.

Sometimes we fail because, though we are very much awake ourselves, we rely exclusively on our own alertness. The inevitable outcome is disaster, for as Jeremiah has truly said: "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

This is the common error of the man who is obsessed with the idea of his own importance and temporarily ignorant of life. It is the common attitude of the worldly man.

Again we omit the other half of the commandment. We besiege heaven with prayer and then shut our eyes to our particular part in God's answer to that prayer. We pray but neglect to watch. Plenty of people who think they are very religious make this mistake.

Jesus' command calls for both vigilance and supplication, readiness and dependence.

"Pray to God and row to shore," says the proverb of the Russian fishermen. "Pray to God and keep your powder dry," runs the saying of our pioneer forefathers.

There are two sides to man's religious life: his own honest efforts and God's guidance and support. Each without the other is inadequate.

GENEROSITY

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.—Acts 20: 35.

The Christmas season is a time when generosity finds its fullest expression. It is natural now to give. And many people are getting a fresh understanding of the experience that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

But it is not just indiscriminate giving that is blessed. There is such a thing as giving in a way to please yourself but injure the recipient. The doting parent and the spoilt child are the well known representatives of that error. But there are others.

We must beware, it is true, of falling into the mean attitude of those disciples who complained when the poor woman brought the box of precious ointment to Jesus. They considered it wasteful, "for this ointment might have been sold for above three hundred shillings and given to the poor." But Jesus rebuked this carping frame of mind.

And yet all this is not to say that there is no need to direct our gifts where they shall bring real benefit. It is so easy to please ourselves in giving and overlook a commonplace but worthy individual or cause.

In this connection it is interesting to recall that the first money received by Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, for the actual sale of his patent rights (for use on a short line from the Post Office to the National Observatory in Washington) was presented by him to a Sunday School.

RICHNESS OF LIFE

Be ye also enlarged.—II Corinthians 6: 13.

One reason why we live such circumscribed lives is because we only give our attention to those things which directly concern our business or our comfort. We forget that a whole universe is at hand to interpret to us the meaning of life.

That is why every one who can possibly do so ought to have some sort of hobby,—some interest to lead outside of himself, where he can lose the strain of his particular life in the wonder of the universal aspect.

It may be some form of sport, or sketching,—no matter how bad the sketches,—or some animal to care for and watch, or (like Oliver Wendell Holmes) measuring and marvelling at New England elm trees. Anything elemental will do.

To centre your attention on your own life in its minor aspects is always discouraging. Bye and bye you will find yourself a prisoner of boredom. But to turn on your life the light and interpretation of the universe is to find in it both beauty and value.

For one of the great lessons which a man must learn if he would experience fulness of life, is how to keep his eye on the particular object before him and his mind on the universe.

Good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people.—Luke 2: 10.

The first quality of a spiritual gift is its universality. It belongs to all people. The exigencies of time and space may call for a limited reception at first, but the gift is not for a privileged few, but for all men.

So is it with the good news on which the celebration of Christmas is founded. Coming first to the shepherds in the fields, it was intended for all the people. Coming first to the Jewish nation, it was directed to all the world. "God so loved the world,"—the cosmos, the sum total of created things,—" that he sent his only begotten son."

And indeed one of the most characteristic features of the Christmas spirit is the desire to share its celebration as widely as possible. The spirit of generosity is abroad. We cannot bear to hear of any one left out. Every appeal for neglected humanity falls on sympathetic ears. The solidarity of the human race is an accepted axiom at this season.

The next step toward the fulfilment of the Christmas spirit is evident: we must make the attitude of good will a permanent spiritual relation with all men.

There are many signs to the unjaundiced eye that this movement is begun. May it receive a fresh impetus and an increasing stability in each Christmas season.

PREPARATIONS

Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of Jehovah; make level in the desert a highway for our God.—Isaiah 40: 3.

No sensible person expects to find a house built or a dinner cooked unless preparations are first made, the materials assembled, and the work done.

And yet lots of people act as if preparation for spiritual realizations were totally unnecessary. They neglect the private and public practices of religion and then feel aggrieved because God seems unreal to them. Some people hustle off to Church unwillingly, sit through service thinking over a thousand and one extraneous matters, and wonder why Church is so dull.

Take this matter of celebrating Christmas. Some people are regularly disappointed in it. They expect some great experience on Christmas Day, but fail to find it. Why? Because they do nothing to prepare their hearts for it.

Not that the preparation produces the experience. No; but the experience requires that we should be prepared in order to appreciate it. Otherwise, like Bunyan's Muck Raker, we will not see the angel because our eyes are fixed on the ground.

There are laws of preparation for enjoying spiritual events just as there are laws of preparation leading up to any other realization you may name.

Is it not a shame to spend so much time preparing for everything else, while we spend so little time preparing ourselves to perceive and appreciate spiritual experiences?

. . . *Because there was no room for them in the inn.* —Luke 2: 7.

There is a deep note of human pathos in the simple narrative of the events of the first Christmas—something infinitely affecting that moves the heart far more profoundly than resounding and eloquent words.

The elemental desires and relations of the human soul are touched: the unutterable yearning of the heart for salvation; the simplicity of the greatest events; the meekness of mankind at the best; the smallness of beginnings that have the most far-reaching consequences.

Take this simple fact: the spiritual King of the whole earth was born in the straw amid the oxen and asses. What an emphasis that gives to man's instinctive desire to show hospitality!

And when we add to it Jesus' teaching "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me," the lesson is complete.

Who can measure the effect of this example on man's generous but often denied instinct to show hospitality to his fellowmen!

How many through the centuries have found shelter and care, fire and food, because the Christchild and his mother and the patient Joseph were crowded that first Christmas night out of the inn and lay in the stable!

"Unbar your heart this evening
And keep no stranger out,
Take from your soul's great portal
The barrier of doubt.
To humble folk and weary
Give hearty welcoming,
Your breast shall be tomorrow
The cradle of a king."

CHRISTMAS IN THE HEART

Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.—Luke 2: 15.

To Bethlehem our hearts, star led
From wanderings far and wild,
Turn to a lowly cattle-shed
And kneel before the Child.

We come from deserts, pitiless
With lonely human pride;
And from the howling wilderness
Where dread and hate abide.

Touched by his hand we find release
From heavy griefs and fears:
Our hearts are lifted up with peace
And purified by tears.

Ah Saviour dear! Thou Holy Child,
What power is thine to heal
Our broken hearts, our wills defiled,
When at thy feet we kneel.

Grant us thy grace no more to roam,
But, following thee alway,
Find Bethlehem in every home,
The whole year Christmas Day.

OBEDIENCE

Christ who . . . though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation.—Hebrews 5: 8, 9.

The same idea is expressed in other words by other writers in the New Testament, but I have chosen this infrequently quoted form because it emphasizes a much neglected word: obedience,—Christ's obedience to his Father and the requirement that we obey Christ.

Obedience is certainly an unpopular idea in the mind of undisciplined age as well as of callow youth. Lots of people love their independence to such a degree that they surrender moral freedom. For moral freedom is not the result of unrestricted self-expression, but of obedience to the will of God:

"Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

That was the way by which Jesus became perfect. Tempted to put his will before God's he prayed victoriously: "Not as I will but as Thou wilt."

As we look about us on the confused moral situation and the tumultuous world conditions of today, can we not see that they are definitely connected with the common despising of obedience? Men are talking a great deal about Jesus and his teaching. What we all need is to obey him. The thing that will make for salvation as a reality both as regards this world and the life beyond, is obedience to him who though he was a son yet learned obedience.

The city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.—Hebrews 11 : 10.

A little boy from the country was with me in New York one day, and I was carelessly talking to him in a way I imagined he would find interesting. I told him about tall buildings, and big bridges, and long trains of cars, and huge busses, and gigantic steamers, and all the wonders of a modern city. He listened for a while and then turned with the fearless and direct gaze of a child, and said quite simply: "Oh, everything's big except what's alive." Was it not the remark of an observant philosopher?

Of course progress has been made in public health and education, etc., etc. But is it or is it not true that our material civilization has far outstripped our mental and moral and physical development? To a fresh and unprejudiced eye, must we not often appear totally insignificant alongside of our creations? The maker may be greater than the thing made; but what if the inventions persistently destroy the inventors? The magnificence and power of our civilization cannot be measured apart from the men in it. For in reality the civilization is only the setting for the men.

What sort of men are they that live amid the wonders and powers of our age? Do they justify or condemn our civilization? Do we seek to build only the tallest, the biggest, the most magnificent city, regardless of its effect on human beings; or do we seek the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God?

CONTENTMENT

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content.—Philippians 4: 11.

Sitting on a rock under a clump of spruces on the Maine sea coast one summer morning, I watched the pleasant panorama of life before me. Overhead in the evergreen branches several warblers were alternately feeding and singing. On the sea beach a plover ran daintily back and forth before the incoming and receding waves to pick up his food. Above the shimmering water darted a tern now and again plunging into the water in pursuit of a fish that ventured near the surface.

I did not hear the tern bewailing his fate because he could not sing like the warblers. Nor did the plover gaze wistfully at the tern and yearn for his long, graceful wings. Nor did the warblers to my knowledge cry out against the injustice of their unwebbed feet.

Only man—until he learns the beauty of God's laws—is querulous, dissatisfied.

There is, of course, a sense in which discontent is a quality of divinity. But what is there divine about the childish rebellion and futile complaining with which we waste so many precious hours?

There are many wrong things which need righting. But not everything that is, is wrong—even among men.

CHEERFUL TRUST

Be of good cheer.—John 16: 33.

One of the most characteristic of Jesus' words in his earthly ministry was, "Be of good cheer." It is unfortunately not so characteristic of his followers as it was of our Master and his first disciples. Our approach to Christianity is often wrong. We ask ourselves: In view of all we know about life, can we reconcile these things with the Christian position?

The first disciples being captured by faith and loyalty, came at the issue from the positive side.

Perhaps that is why they were more joyful and consequently more daring and powerful than most of us.

Of course it is only the fool who is continuously lighthearted. We are wisely told to "rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep." But nothing is more helpful to your friend and yourself than a consistent tone of cheerfulness running through your life.

There is a sense in which human life is an insoluble riddle. But does it become more desirable or valuable when we lugubriously occupy ourselves with this single aspect? Life is an experience to be enjoyed as well as a problem to be solved.

Jesus radiated good cheer because he trusted in God's ability to use men for his holy purpose, rather than in man's ability to explain and manage the universe.

Faith in God is the one sure source of cheerfulness.

A QUIET HEART

Because he knew no quietness within him,
He shall not save aught of that wherein he delighteth.
—Job 20:20.

This chapter of Job describes "the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God." The heart of its truth is found in the brief phrase "no quietness within him."

The wicked man cannot obtain quietness within. He is adrift on a sea of calamity. Like an ill-ballasted ship even a favourable wind only serves to buffet him. All the meaning and purpose is gone out of life because the spiritual stability is lacking. The very things he desires turn to nothing as he obtains them.

It is all an old and commonplace story; but until it is driven home to the conscience of humanity there will always be an extra supply of sorrow and trouble in the world.

Every returned Prodigal Son knows it well, and many a man who is still in the riotous living stage begins to perceive it, but still lacks the courage and strength to acknowledge himself wrong and turn in the new direction.

On the other hand the man who carries in himself the peace of God which passeth understanding may be hard beset by the tempests of life. He may even be shipwrecked as many a gallant vessel has been. But his shall be the glory of going down with his gear intact and himself in the line of duty.

And even the last struggle shall be waged with joy because there is quietness within.

CHRISTIAN HOPE

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit.—Romans 15: 13.

The Christian doctrine of hope is one of the most important of all doctrines. And yet it is little spoken of and less meditated upon. Why is this?

Is it not because we erroneously think that hope is simply a weak word for faith? Of course if that were true, we should be quite right in finding hope superseded by faith. But hope in the Christian sense is an entirely different thing. It is not that which may become faith; it is rather the flower of faith, the desire for and the expectation of future good, both for this life and for the life beyond death. Faith in God is the root out of which that hope springs and, apart from it, faith must ever stand in danger of degenerating into a fanatical obsession without meaning for human life.

Christian hope is not the mere unreasoning resiliency of the human spirit, the toughness of the fibre of life. The Christian does not shut his eyes and declare obstinately and stubbornly: "Nevertheless I will hope." Rather he lifts up his eyes and says: "I believe in God, and therefore will I hope."

More than this: the Christian finds justification for hope not only as a conclusion from considering the nature of God, but above all as an experience of the living presence of God with him in every event of life.

INDEX OF IDEAS

The purpose of this index is to make accessible in alphabetical order the main ideas presented in these reflections. With this end in view all references to the same general idea are grouped under the simplest word or phrase that may represent or suggest that idea.

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